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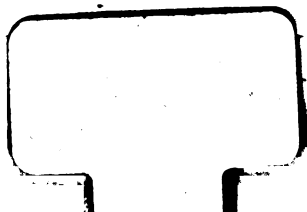
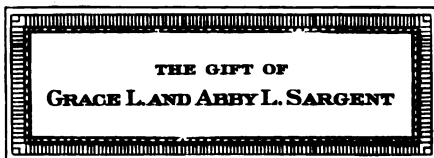
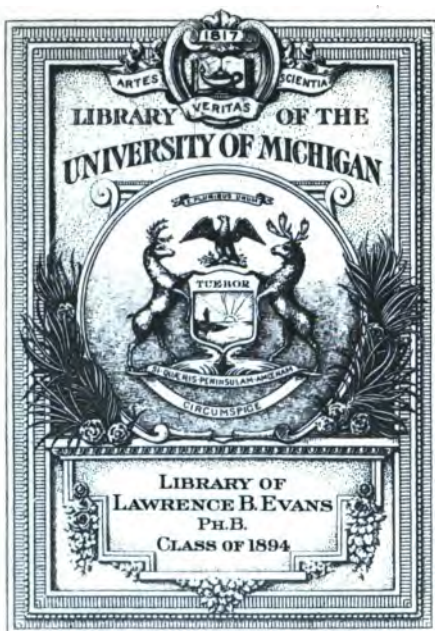
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THE BENEFACTRESS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"ELIZABETH AND HER GERMAN GARDEN."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

ELIZABETH AND HER GERMAN GARDEN	. . .	1 vol.
THE SOLITARY SUMMER.		1 vol.

Russell, Mary Annette (Beaumont) Russell, Countess

THE BENEFACTRESS

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"ELIZABETH AND HER GERMAN GARDEN"

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IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

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THE BENEFACTRESS.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN Anna Estcourt was twenty-five, and had begun to wonder whether the pleasure extractable from life at all counterbalanced the bother of it, a wonderful thing happened.

She was an exceedingly pretty girl, who ought to have been enjoying herself. She had a soft, irregular face, charming eyes, dimples, a pleasant laugh, and limbs that were long and slender. Certainly she ought to have been enjoying herself. Instead, she wasted her time in that foolish pondering over the puzzles of existence, over those unanswerable whys and wherefores, which is as a rule restricted, among women, to the elderly and plain. Many and various are the motives that impel a woman so to ponder; in Anna's case the motive was nothing more exalted than the perpetual presence of a sister-in-law. The

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sister-in-law was rich—in itself a pleasing circumstance; but the sister-in-law was also frank, and her husband and Anna were entirely dependent on her, and her richness and her frankness combined urged her to make fatiguingly frequent allusions to the Estcourt poverty. Except for their bad taste her husband did not mind these allusions much, for he considered that he had given her a full equivalent for her money in bestowing his name on a person who had practically none: he was Sir Peter Estcourt of the Devonshire Estcourts, and she was a Dobbs of Birmingham. Besides, he was a philosopher, and philosophers never mind anything. But Anna was in a less agreeable situation. She was not a philosopher, she was thin-skinned, she had bestowed nothing and was taking everything, and she was of an independent nature; and an independent nature, where there is no money, is a great nuisance to its possessor.

When she was younger and more high-flown she sometimes talked of sweeping crossings; but her sister-in-law Susie would not hear of crossings, and dressed her beautifully, and took her out, and made her dance and dine and do as other girls did, being of opinion that a rich husband of good position was more satisfactory than crossings, and far more likely to make some return for all the expenses she had had.

At eighteen Anna was so pretty that the perfect husband seemed to be a mere question of days. What

could the most desirable of men, thought Susie considering her, want more than so bewitching a young creature? But he did not come, somehow, that man of Susie's dreams; and after a year or two, when Anna began to understand what all this dressing and dancing really meant, and after she had had offers from people she did not like, and had herself fallen in love with a youth of no means who was prudent enough to marry somebody else with money, she shrank back and grew colder, and objected more and more decidedly to Susie's strenuous private matrimonial urgings, and sometimes made remarks of a cynical nature to her admirers, who took fright at such symptoms of advancing age, and fell off considerably in numbers.

It was at this period, when she was barely twenty-two, that she spoke of crossings. Susie had seriously reproved her for not meeting the advances of an old and rich and single person with more enthusiasm, and had at the same time alluded to the number of pounds she had spent on her every year for the last three years, and the necessity for putting an end, by marrying, to all this outlay; and instead of being sensible, and talking things over quietly, Anna had poured out a flood of foolish sentiments about the misery of knowing that she was expected to be nice to every man with money, the intolerableness of the life she was leading, and

the superior attractions of crossing-sweeping as a means of earning a livelihood.

"Why, you haven't enough money for the broom," said Susie impatiently. "You can't sweep without a broom, you know. I wish you were a little less silly, Anna, and a little more grateful. Most girls would jump at the splendid opportunity you've got now of marrying, and taking up a position of your own. You talk a great deal of stuff about being independent, and when you get the chance, and I do all I can to help you, you fly into a passion and want to sweep a crossing. Really," added Susie, twitching her shoulder, "you might remember that it isn't all roses for me either, trying to get someone else's daughter married."

"Of course it isn't all roses," said Anna, leaning against the mantelpiece and looking down at her with perplexed eyebrows. "I am very sorry for you. I wish you weren't so anxious to get rid of me. I wish I could do something to help you. But you know, Susie, you haven't taught me a trade. I can't set up on my own account unless you'll give me a last present of a broom, and let me try my luck at the nearest crossing. The one at the end of the street is badly kept. What do you think if I started there?" What answer could anyone make to such folly?

By the time she was twenty-four, nearly all the girls who had come out when she did were married,

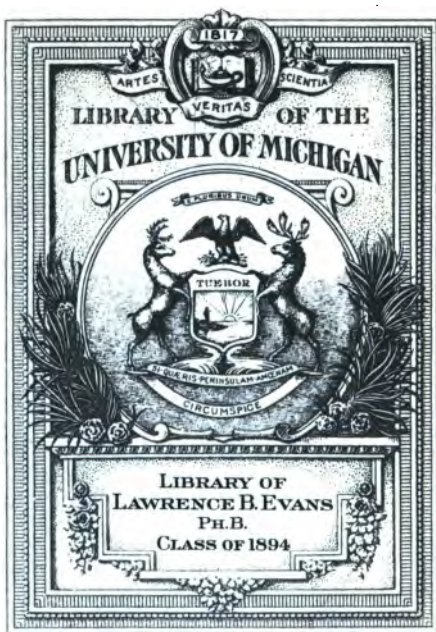
and she felt as though she were a ghost haunting the ball-rooms of a younger generation. Disliking this feeling, she stiffened, and became more and more unapproachable; and it was at this period that she invented excuses for missing most of the functions to which she was invited, and began to affect a simplicity of dress and hair arrangement that was severe. Susie's exasperation was now at its height. "I don't know why you should be bent on making the worst of yourself," she said angrily, when Anna absolutely refused to alter her hair.

"I'm tired of being frivolous," said Anna. "Have you an idea how long those waves took to do? And you know how Hilton talks. It all gets whisked up now in two minutes, and I'm spared her conversation."

"But you are quite plain," cried Susie. "You are not like the same girl. The only thing your best friend could say about you now is that you look clean."

"Well, I like to look clean," said Anna, and continued to go about the world with hair tucked neatly behind her ears; her immediate reward being an offer from a clergyman within the next fortnight.

Peter Estcourt was even more surprised than his wife that Anna had not made a good match years before. Of course she had no money, but she was a pretty girl of good family, and it ought to be easy



THE GIFT OF
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enough for her to find a husband. He wished heartily that she might soon be happily married; for he loved her, and knew that she and Susie could never, with their best endeavours, be great friends. Besides, every woman ought to have a home of her own, and a husband and children. Whenever he thought of Anna, he thought exactly this; and when he had reached the proposition at the end he felt that he could do no more, and began to think of something else.

His marriage with Susie, a person of whom no one had ever heard, had brought out and developed stores of unsuspected philosophy in him. Before that he was quite poor, and very merry; but he loved Estcourt, and could not bear to see it falling into ruin, and he loved his small sister, who was then only ten, and wished to give her a decent education, and what is a man to do? There happened to be no rich American girls about at that time, so he married Miss Dobbs of Birmingham, and became a philosopher.

It was hard on Susie that he should become a philosopher at her expense. She did not like philosophers. She did not understand their silent ways, and their evenness of temper. After she had done all that Peter wanted with regard to the place in Devonshire, and had provided Anna with every luxury in the shape of governesses, and presented her hus-

band with an heir to the retrieved family fortunes, she thought that she had a right to some enjoyment too, to some gratification from her position, and was surprised to find how little was forthcoming. Really no one could do more than she had done, and yet nothing was done for her. Peter fished, and read, and was with difficulty removable from Estcourt. Anna was, of course, too young to be grateful, but there she was, taking everything as a matter of course, her very unconsciousness an irritation. Susie wanted to get on in the world, and nobody helped her. She wanted to bury the Dobbs part of herself, and develop the Estcourt part; but the Dobbs part was natural, and the Estcourt superficial, and the Dobbsses were one and all singularly unattractive—a race of eager, restless, wiry little men and women, anxious to get as much as they could, and keep it as long as they could, a family succeeding in gathering a good deal of money together in one place, and failing entirely in the art of making friends. Susie was the best of them, and had been the pretty one at home; yet she was not in the least a success in London. She put it down to Peter's indifference, to his slowness in introducing her to his friends. It was no more Peter's fault than it was her own. It was not her fault that she was not pretty—there never had been a beautiful Dobbs—and it was not her fault that she was so unfortunately frank, and

never could and never did conceal her feverish eagerness to make desirable acquaintances, and to get into desirable sets. Until Anna came out she was invited only to the big functions to which the whole world went; and the hours she passed at them were not among the most blissful of her life. The people who were at first inclined to be kind to her for Peter's sake, dropped off when they found how her eagerness to attract the attention of someone mightier made her unable to fix her thoughts on the friendly remarks that they were taking pains to make. In society she was absent-minded, fidgety, obviously on the look-out for a chance of drawing the biggest fish into her little net; but, wealthy as she was, she was not wealthy enough in an age of millionaires, and not once during the whole of her career was a big fish simple enough to be caught.

After a time her natural shrewdness and common sense made her perceive that her one claim to the scanty attentions she did receive was her money. Her money had bought her Peter, and a pleasant future for her children; it had converted a Dobbs into an Estcourt; it had given her everything she had that was worth anything at all. Once she had thoroughly realised this, she began to attach a tremendous importance to the mere possession of money, and grew very stingy, making difficulties about spending that grieved Peter greatly; not be-

cause he ever wanted her money now that Estcourt had been restored to its old splendour and set going again for their boy, but because meanness about money in a woman was something he could not comprehend—something repulsive, unfeminine, contrary to her nature as he had always understood it. He left off making the least suggestion about Anna's education or the household arrangements; everything that was done was done of Susie's own accord; and he spent more and more time in Devonshire, and grew more and more philosophical, and when he did talk to his wife, restricted his conversation to the language of abstract wisdom.

Now this was very hard on Susie, who had no appreciation of abstract wisdom, and who lived as lonely a life as it is possible to imagine. Peter kept out of her way. Anna was subject to prolonged fits of chilly silence. Susie used, at such times, to think regretfully of the cheerful Dobbs days, of their frank and congenial vulgarity.

When Anna was eighteen, Susie's prospects brightened for a time. Doors that had been shut ever since she married, opened before her on her appearing with such a pretty *débutante* under her wing, and she could enjoy the reflected glory of Anna's little triumphs. And then, without any apparent reason, Anna had altered so strangely, and had disappointed everyone's expectations; never en-

couraging the right man, never ready to do as she was told, exasperatingly careless on all matters of vital importance, and ending by showing symptoms of freezing into something of the same philosophical state as Peter. Their mother had been German—a lady-in-waiting to one of the German princesses; and their father had met her and married her while he was secretary at the English Embassy in St. Petersburg. And Susie, who had heard of German philosophy and German stolidity, and despised them both with all her heart, concluded that the German strain was accountable for everything about Peter and Anna that was beyond her comprehension; and sometimes, when Peter was more than usually wise and unapproachable, would call him Herr Schopenhauer—which had an immediate effect of producing a silence that lasted for weeks; for not only did he like her least when she was playful, but he had, as a matter of fact, read a great deal of Schopenhauer, and was uneasily conscious that it had not been good for him.

While Peter fished, and meditated on the vanity of human wishes at Estcourt, Anna, with rare exceptions, was wherever Susie was, and Susie was wherever it was fashionable to be. For a week or two in the summer, for a day or two at Easter, they went down to Devonshire; and Anna might wander about the old house and grounds as she chose, and

feel how much better she had loved it in its tumble-down state, the state she had known as a child, when her mother lived there and was happy. Everything was aggressively spruce now, indoors and out. Susie's money and Susie's taste had rubbed off all the mellowness and all the romance. Anna was glad to leave it again, and be taken to Marienbad, or any place where there was royalty, for Susie loved royalty. But what a life it was, going round year after year with Susie! London, Devonshire, Marienbad, Scotland, London again, following with patient feet wherever the unconscious royalties led, meeting the same people, listening to the same music, talking the same talk, eating the same dinners—would no one ever invent anything new to eat? The inexpressible boredom of riding up and down the Row every morning, the unutterable hours shopping and trying on clothes, the weariness of all the new pictures, and all the concerts, and all the operas, which seemed to grow less pleasing every year, as her eye and ear grew more critical. She knew at last every note of the stock operas and concerts, and every note seemed to have got onto her nerves.

And then the people they knew—the everlasting sameness of them, content to go the same dull round for ever. Driving in the Park with Susie, neither of them speaking a word, she used to watch the faces in the other carriages, nearly all faces of acquaint-

THE BENEFACTRESS.

ces, to see whether any of them looked cheerful; and it was the rarest thing to come across any expression but one of blankest boredom. Bored and cross, hardly ever speaking to the person with them, their friends drove up and down every afternoon, and she and Susie did the same, as silent and as bored as any of them. A few unusually beautiful, or unusually witty, or unusually young persons appeared to find life pleasant and looked happy, but they avoided Susie. Her set was made up of the dull and plain; and all the amusing people, and all the interesting people, turned their backs with one accord on her and it.

These were the circumstances that drove Anna to reflect on the problems of life every time she was beyond the sound of Susie's voice.

She passionately resented her position of dependence on Susie, and she passionately resented the fact that the only way to get out of it was to marry. Every time she had an offer, she first of all refused it with an energy that astonished the unhappy suitor, and then spent days and nights of agony because she had refused it, and because Susie wanted her to accept it, and because of an immense pity for Susie that had taken possession of her heart. How could Peter live so placidly at Susie's expense, and treat her with such a complete want of tenderness? Anna's love for her brother diminished considerably directly

she began to understand Susie's life. It was such a pitiful little life of cringing, and pushing, and heroically smiling in the face of ill-treatment. No one cared for her in the very least. She had hundreds of acquaintances, who would eat her dinners and go away and poke fun at her, but not a single friend. Her husband lived on her and hardly spoke to her. Her boy at Eton, an amazing prig, looked down on her. Her little daughter never dreamed of obeying her. Anna herself was prevented by some stubborn spirit of fastidiousness, evidently not possessed by any of her contemporaries, from doing the only thing Susie had ever really wanted her to do—marrying, and getting herself out of the way. What if Susie were a vulgar little woman of no education and no family? That did not make it any the more glorious for the Estcourts to take all they could and ignore her existence. It was, after all, Susie who paid the bills. Anna pitied her from the bottom of her heart; such a forlorn little woman, taken out of her proper sphere, and left to shiver all alone, without a shred of love to cover and comfort her.

It was when she was away from Susie that she felt this. When she was with her, she found herself as cold and quiet and contradictory as Peter. She used, whenever she got the chance, to go to afternoon service at St. Paul's. It was the only place and time in which all the bad part of her was soothed

into quiet, and the good allowed to prevail in peace. The privacy of the great place, where she never met anyone she knew, the beauty of the music, the stateliness of the service offered every day in equal perfection to any poor wretch choosing to turn his back for an hour on the perplexities of life, all helped to hush her grievances to sleep and fill her heart with tenderness for those who were not happy, and for those who did not know they were unhappy, and for those who wasted their one precious life in being wretched when they might have been happy. How little it would need, she thought (for she was young and imaginative), to turn most people's worries and sadness into joy. Such a little difference in Susie's ways and ideas would make them all so happy; such a little change in Peter's habits would make his wife's life radiant. But they all lived blindly on, each day a day of emptiness, each of those precious days, so crowded with opportunities, and possibilities, and unheeded blessings, and presently life would be behind them, and their chances gone for ever.

"The world is a dreadful place, full of unhappy people," she thought, looking out onto the world with unhappy eyes. "Each one by himself, with no one to comfort him. Each one with more than he can bear, and no one to help him. Oh, if I could, I would help and comfort everyone

that is sad, or sick at heart, or sorry—oh, if I could!”

And she dreamed of all that she would do if she were Susie—rich, and free from any sort of interference—to help others, less fortunate, to be happy too. But, since she was the very reverse of rich and free, she shook off these dreams, and made numbers of good resolutions instead—resolutions bearing chiefly on her future behaviour towards Susie. And she would come out of the church filled with the sternest resolves to be ever afterwards kind and loving to her; and the very words Susie uttered would either irritate her into speeches that made her sorry, or freeze her back into her ordinary state of cold aloofness.

If Susie had had an idea that Anna was pitying her, and making good resolutions of which she was the object at afternoon services, and that in her eyes she had come to be merely a cross which must with heroism be borne, she probably would have been indignant. Pitying people and being pitied oneself are two very different things. The first is soothing and sweet, the second is annoying, or even maddening, according to the temperament of the patient. Susie, however, never suspected that anyone could be sorry for her; and when, after a party, before they went to bed, Anna would put her arms round her and give her a disproportionately tender kiss,

she would show her surprise openly. "Why, what's the matter?" she would ask. "Another mood, Anna?" For she would not know how much Anna felt the snubs she had seen her receive. How should she? She was so used to them that she hardly noticed them herself.

It was when Anna was twenty-five, and much vexed in body by efforts to be and to do as Susie wished, and in soul by those unanswerable questions as to the why and wherefore of the aimless, useless existence she was leading, that the wonderful thing happened that changed her whole life.

CHAPTER II.

THERE was a German relation of Anna's, her mother's brother, known to Susie as Uncle Joachim. He had been twice to England: once during his sister's life, when Anna was little, and Peter was unmarried, and they were all poor and happy together at Estcourt; and once after Susie's introduction into the family, just at that period when Anna was beginning to stiffen and put her hair behind her ears.

Susie knew all about him, having inquired with her usual frankness on first hearing of his existence whether he would be likely to leave Anna anything on his death; and upon being informed that he had a family of sons, and large estates and little money, looked upon it as a great hardship to be obliged to have him in her London house. She objected to all Germans, and thought this particular one a dreadful old man, and never wearied of making humorous comments on his clothes and the oddness of his manners at meals. She was vexed that he should be with them in Hill Street, and refused to give dinners

while he was there. She also asked him several times if he would not enjoy a stay at Estcourt, and said that the country was now at its best, and the primroses were in full beauty.

"I want not primroses," said Uncle Joachim, who seldom spoke at length; "I live in the country. I will now see London."

So he went about diligently to all the museums and picture-galleries, sometimes alone and sometimes with Anna, who neglected her social duties more than ever in order to be with him, for she loved him.

They talked together chiefly in German, Uncle Joachim carefully correcting her mistakes; and while they went frugally in omnibuses to the different sights, and ate buns in confectioners' shops at lunch-time, and walked long distances where no omnibuses were to be found—for besides having a great fear of hansoms he was very thrifty—he drew her out, saying little himself, and in a very short time knew almost as much about her life and her perplexities as she did.

She was very happy during his visit, and told herself contentedly that blood, after all, was thicker than water. She did not stop to consider what she meant exactly by this, but she had a vague notion that Susie was the water. She felt that Uncle Joachim understood her better than anyone had yet done; and was it not natural that her dear mother's

brother should? And it was only after she had taken him to service at St. Paul's that she began to perceive that there might perhaps be points on which their tastes differed. Uncle Joachim had remained seated while other people knelt or stood; but that did not matter in that liberal place, where nobody notices the degree of his neighbour's devoutness. And he had slept during the anthem, one of those unaccompanied anthems that are sung there with what seem of a certainty to be the voices of angels. And on coming out, when a fugue was rolling in glorious confusion down the echoing aisles, and Anna, who preferred her fugues confused, felt that her spirit was being caught up to heaven, he had looked at her rapt face and wet eyelashes, and patted her hand very kindly, and said encouragingly, "In my youth I too cultivated Bach. Now I cultivate pigs. Pigs are better."

Anna's mother had been his only sister, and he had come over, not, as he told Susie, to see London, but to see Susie herself, and to find out how it was that Anna had reached an age that in Germany is the age of old maids without marrying. By the time he had spent two evenings in Hill Street he had formed his opinion of his nephew and his nephew's wife, and they remained fixed until his death. "The good Peter," he said suddenly one day to Anna when they were wandering together in the maze at

Hampton Court—for he faithfully went the rounds of sight-seeing prescribed by Baedeker, and Anna followed him wherever he went—"the good Peter is but a *Quatschkopf*."

"A *Quatschkopf*?" echoed Anna, whose acquaintance with her mother-tongue did not extend to the byways of opprobrium. "What in the world is a *Quatschkopf*?"

"A *Quatschkopf* is a *Duselfritz*," explained Uncle Joachim, "and also it is the good Peter."

"I believe you are calling him ugly names," said Anna, slipping her arm through his; by this time, if not kindred spirits, they were the best of friends.

Uncle Joachim did not immediately reply. They had come to the open space in the middle of the maze, and he sat down on the seat to recover his breath, and to wipe his forehead; for though the wind was cold the sun was fierce. "*Gott, was man alles durchmacht auf Reisen!*" he sighed. Then he put his handkerchief back into his pocket, looked up at Anna, who was standing in front of him leaning on her sunshade, and said, "A *Quatschkopf* is a foolish fellow who marries a woman like that."

"Oh, poor Susie!" cried Anna, at once ready to defend her, and full of the kindly feelings absence invariably produced. "Peter did a very sensible thing. But I don't think Susie did, marrying Peter."

"He is a *Quatschkopf*," said Uncle Joachim, not

to be shaken in his opinions, "and the *geborene* Dobbs is a vulgar woman who is not rich enough."

"Not rich enough? Why, we are all suffocated by her money. We never hear of anything else. It would be dreadful if she had still more."

"Not rich enough," persisted Uncle Joachim, pursing up his lips into an expression of great disapproval, and shaking his head. "Such a woman should be a millionaire. Not of marks, but of pounds sterling. Short of that, a man of birth does not impose her as a mother on his children. Peter has done it. He is a *Quatschkopf*."

"It is a great mercy that she isn't a millionaire," said Anna, appalled by the mere thought. "Things would be just the same, except that there would be all that money more to hear about. I hate the very name of money."

"Nonsense. Money is very good."

"But not somebody else's."

"That is true," said Uncle Joachim approvingly. "One's own is the only money that is truly pleasant." Then he added, suddenly, "Tell me, how comes it that you are not married?"

Anna frowned. "Now you are growing like Susie," she said.

"*Ach*—she asks you that often?"

"Yes—no, not quite like that. She says she knows why I am not married."

"And what knows she?"

"She says that I frighten everybody away," said Anna, digging the point of her sunshade into the ground. Then she looked at Uncle Joachim, and laughed.

"What?" he said, incredulously. This pretty creature standing before him, so soft and young—for that she was twenty-four was hardly credible—could not by any possibility be anything but lovable.

"She says that I am disagreeable to people—that I look cross—that I don't encourage them enough. Now isn't it simply terrible to be expected to encourage any wretched man who has money? I don't want anybody to marry me. I don't want to buy my independence that way. Besides, it isn't really independence."

"For a woman it is the one life," said Uncle Joachim with great decision. "Talk not to me of independence. Such words are not for the lips of girls. It is a woman's pride to lean on a good husband. It is her happiness to be shielded and protected by him. Outside the narrow circle of her home, for her happiness is not. The woman who never marries has missed all things."

"I don't believe it," said Anna.

"It is nevertheless true."

"Look at Susie—is she so happy?"

"I said a *good* husband; not a *Duselfritz*."

"And as for narrow circles, why, how happy, how gloriously happy I could be outside them, if only I were independent!"

"Independent — independent," repeated Uncle Joachim testily, "always this same foolish word. What hast thou in thy head, child, thy pretty woman's head, made, if ever head was, to lean on a good man's shoulder?"

"Oh—good men's shoulders," said Anna, shrugging her own, "I don't want to lean on anybody's shoulder. I want to hold my head up straight, all by itself. Do you then admire limp women, dear uncle, whose heads roll about all loose till a good man comes along and props them up?"

"These are English ideas. I like them not," said Uncle Joachim, looking stony.

Anna sat down on the seat by his side, and laid her cheek for a moment against his sleeve. "This is the only good man's shoulder it will ever lean on," she said. "If I were a preacher, do you know what I would preach?"

"Thou art not, and never wilt be, a preacher."

"But if I were? Do you know what I would preach? Early and late? In season and out of it?"

"Much nonsense, I doubt not."

"I would preach independence. Only that. Always that. They would be sermons for women only; and they would be warnings against props."

She sat up and looked at him out of the corners of her eyes, but he continued to stare stonily into space.

"I would thump the cushions, and cry out, 'Be independent, independent, independent! Don't talk so much, and do more. Go your own way, and let your neighbour go his. Don't meddle with other people when you have all your own work cut out for you being good yourself. Shake off all the props——'"

"Anna, thou art talking folly."

"—shake them off, the props tradition and authority offer you, and go alone—crawl, stumble, stagger, but go alone. You won't learn to walk without tumbles, and knocks, and bruises, but you'll never learn to walk at all so long as there are props.' Oh," she said fervently, casting up her eyes, "there is nothing, nothing like getting rid of one's props!"

"I never yet," observed Uncle Joachim, in his turn casting up his eyes, "saw a girl who so greatly needs the guidance of a good man. Hast thou never loved, then?" he added, turning on her suddenly.

"Yes," replied Anna promptly. If Uncle Joachim chose to ask such direct questions she would give him straight answers.

"But——?"

"He went away and married somebody else. I had no money, and she had a great deal. So you

see he was a very sensible young man." And she laughed, for she had long ago ceased to be anything but amused by the remembrance of her one excursion into the rocky regions of love.

"That," said Uncle Joachim, "was not true love."

"Oh, but it was."

"Nay. One does not laugh at love."

"It was all I had, anyhow. There isn't any more left. It was very bad while it lasted, and it took at least two years to get over it. What things I did to please that young man and appear lovely in his eyes! The hours it took to dress, and get my hair done just right. I endured tortures if I didn't look as beautiful as I thought I could look, and was always giving my poor maid notice. And plots—the way I plotted to get taken to the places where he would be! I never was so artful before or since. Poor Susie was quite helpless. It is a mercy it all ended as it did."

"That," repeated Uncle Joachim, "was not true love."

"Yes, it was."

"No, my child."

"Yes, my uncle. I laugh now, but it was very dreadful at the time."

"Thou art but a goose," he said, shrugging his shoulders; but immediately patted her hand lest her feelings should have been hurt. And, declining

further argument, he demanded to be taken to the Great Vine.

It was in this fashion, Anna talking, and Uncle Joachim making brief comments, that he came to know her as thoroughly as though he had lived with her all his life.

Soon after the excursion to Hampton Court a letter came that hurried his departure, to Susie's ill-concealed relief.

"My swines are ill," he informed her, greatly agitated, his fragile English going altogether to pieces in his perturbation; "my inspector writes they perpetually die. God keep thee, Anna," and he embraced her very tenderly, and bending hastily over Susie's hand muttered some conventionalities, and then disappeared into his four-wheeler and out of their lives.

They never saw him again.

"My swines are ill," mimicked Susie, when Anna, feeling that she had lost her one friend, came slowly back into the room, "my swines perpetually die——"

Anna was obliged to go and pray very hard at St. Paul's before she could forgive her.

CHAPTER III.

THE old man died at Christmas, and in the following March, when Anna was going about more sad and listless than ever, the news came that, though his inherited estates had gone to his sons, he had bought a little place some years before with the intention of retiring to it in his extreme old age, and this little place he had left to his dear and only niece Anna.

She was alone when the letters bringing the news arrived, sitting in the drawing-room with a book in her hands at which she did not look, feeling utterly downcast, indifferent, too hopeless to want anything or mind anything, accepting her destiny of years of days like this, with herself going through them lonely, useless, and always older, and telling herself that she did not after all care. "What does it matter, so long as I have a comfortable bed, and fires when I am cold, and meals when I am hungry?" she thought. "Not to have those is the only real misery. All the rest is purest fancy. What right have I to be happier than other people? If they are contented by such

things I can be contented too. And what does a useless being like me deserve, I should like to know? It was detestably ungrateful of me to have been unhappy all this time."

She got up aimlessly, and looked out of the window into the sunny street, where the dust was racing by on the gusty March wind, and the women selling daffodils at the corner were more battered and blown about and red-eyed than ever. She had often, in those moments when her whole body tingled with a wild longing to be up and doing and justifying her existence before it was too late, envied these poor women, because they worked. She wondered vaguely now at her folly. "It is much better to be comfortable," she thought, going back to the fire as aimlessly as she had gone to the window, "and it is sheer idiocy quarrelling with a life that other people would think quite tolerable."

Then the door opened, and the letters were brought in—the wonderful letters that struck the whole world into radiance—lying together with bills and ordinary notes on a salver, carried by an indifferent servant, handed to her as though they were things of nought—the wonderful letters that changed her life.

At first she did not understand what it was that they meant, and pored over the cramped German writing, reading the long sentences over and over

again, till something suddenly seemed to clutch at her heart. Was this possible? Was this actual truth? Was Uncle Joachim, who had so much objected to her longing for independence, giving it to her with both hands, and every blessing along with it? She read them through again, very carefully, holding them with shaking hands. Yes, it was true. She began to cry, sobbing over them for very love and tenderness, her whole being melted into gratitude and humbleness, awestruck by a sense of how little she had deserved it, dazzled by the thousand lovely colours life, in the twinkling of an eye, had taken on.

There were two letters—one from Uncle Joachim's lawyer, and one from Uncle Joachim himself, written soon after his return from England, with directions on the envelope that it was to be sent to Anna after his death.

Uncle Joachim was not a man to express sentiment otherwise than by patting those he loved affectionately on the back, and the letter over which Anna hung with such tender gratitude, and such an extravagance of humility, was a mere bald statement of facts. Since Anna, with a perversity that he entirely disapproved, refused to marry, and appeared to be possessed of the obstinacy that had always been a peculiarity of her German forefathers, and which was well enough in a man, but undesirable in a

woman, whose calling it was to be gentle and yielding (*sanft und nachgiebig*) and convinced, from what he had seen during his visit to London, that she could never by any possibility be happy with her brother and sister-in-law, and moreover considering that it was beneath the dignity of his sister's daughter, a young lady of good family for ever to roll herself in the feathers with which the middle-class goose born Dobbs had furnished Peter's otherwise defective nest, he had decided to make her independent altogether of them, numerous though his own sons were, and angry as they no doubt would be, by bestowing on her absolutely after his death the only property that he could leave to whomsoever he chose, a small estate near Stralsund, where he hoped to pass his last years. It was in a flourishing condition, easy to manage, bringing in a yearly average of forty thousand marks, and with an experienced inspector whom he earnestly recommended her to keep. He trusted his dear Anna would go and live there, and keep it up to its present state of excellence, and would finally marry a good German gentleman, of whom there were many, and return in this way altogether to the country of her forefathers. The estate was not so far from Stralsund as to make it impossible for her to drive there when she wished to indulge any feminine desire she might have to trim herself (*sich putzen*), and he recommended her to begin a new

life, settling there with some grave and sober female advanced in years as companion and protectress, until such time as she should, by marriage, pass into the care of that natural protector, her husband.

Then followed a short exposition of his views on women, especially those women who go to parties all their lives and talk *Klatsch*; a spirited comparing of such women with those whose interests keep them busy in their own homes; and a final exhortation to Anna to seize this opportunity of choosing the better life, which was always, he said, a life of simplicity, frugality, and hard work.

Anna wept and laughed together over this letter—the tenderest laughter and the happiest tears. It seemed by turns the wildest improbability that she should be well off, and the most natural thing in the world. Susie was out. Never had her absence been terrible before. Anna could hardly bear the waiting. She walked up and down the room, for sitting still was impossible, holding the precious letters tight in her little cold hands, her cheeks burning, her eyes sparkling, in an agony of impatience and anxiety lest something should have happened to delay Susie at this supreme moment. At the window end of the room she stopped each time she reached it and looked eagerly up and down the street, the flower-women, and the blessedness of selling daffodils, having within an hour become profoundly indifferent to

her. At the other end of the room, where a bureau stood, she came to a standstill too, and snatching up a pen began a letter to Peter in Devonshire; but, hearing wheels, threw it down and flew to the window again. It was not Susie's carriage, and she went back to the letter and wrote another line; then again to the window; then again to the letter; and it was the letter's turn as Susie, fagged from a round of calls, came in.

Susie's afternoon had not been a success. She had made advances to a woman of enviably high position with the intrepidity that characterised all her social movements, and she had been snubbed for her pains with more than usual rudeness. She had had, besides, several minor annoyances. And to come in worn out, and have your sister-in-law, who would hardly speak to you at luncheon, fall on your neck and begin violently to kiss you, is really a little hard on a woman who is already cross.

"Now what in the name of fortune is the matter now?" gasped Susie, breathlessly disengaging herself.

"Oh, Susie! oh, Susie!" cried Anna incoherently, "what ages you have been away—and the letters came directly you had gone—and I've been watching for you ever since, and was so dreadfully afraid something had happened——"

"But what are you talking about, Anna?" inter-

rupted Susie irritably. It was late, and she wanted to rest for a few minutes before dressing to go out again, and here was Anna in a new mood of a violent nature, and she was weary beyond measure of all Anna's moods.

"Oh, such a wonderful thing has happened!" cried Anna; "Such a wonderful thing! What will Peter say? And how glad you will be——" And she thrust the letters with trembling fingers into Susie's unresponsive hand.

"What is it?" said Susie, looking at them bewildered.

"Oh, no—I forgot," said Anna, wildly as it seemed to Susie, pulling them out of her hand again. "You can't read German—see here——" And she began to unfold them and smoothe out the creases she had made, her hands shaking visibly.

Susie stared. Clearly something extraordinary had happened, for the frosty Anna of the last few months had melted into a radiance of emotion that would only not be ridiculous if it turned out to be justified.

"Two German letters," said Anna, sitting down on the nearest chair, spreading them out on her lap, and talking as though she could hardly get the words out fast enough, "one from Uncle Joachim——"

"Uncle Joachim?" repeated Susie, a disagreeable and creepy doubt as to Anna's sanity coming over

her. "You know very well he's dead and can't write letters," she said severely.

"—and one from his lawyer," Anna went on, regardless of everything but what she had to tell. "The lawyer's letter is full of technical words, difficult to understand, but it is only to confirm what Uncle Joachim says, and his is quite plain. He wrote it some time before he died, and left it with his lawyer to send on to me."

Susie was listening now with all her ears. Lawyers, deceased uncles, and Anna's sparkling face could only have one meaning.

"Uncle Joachim was our mother's only brother——"

"I know, I know," interrupted Susie impatiently.

"—and was the dearest and kindest of uncles to me——"

"Never mind what he was," interrupted Susie still more impatiently. "What has he done for you? Tell me that. You always pretended, both of you—Peter too—that he had miles of sandy places somewhere in the desert, and dozens of boys. What could he do for you?"

"Do for me?" Anna rose up with a solemnity worthy of the great news about to be imparted, put both her hands on Susie's little shoulders, and looking down at her with shining eyes, said slowly, "He has left me an estate bringing in forty thousand marks a year."

"Forty thousand!" echoed Susie, completely awestruck.

"Marks," said Anna.

"Oh, marks," said Susie, chilled. "That's francs, isn't it? I really thought for a moment——"

"They're more than francs. It brings in, on an average, two thousand pounds a year. Two—thousand—pounds—a—year," repeated Anna, nodding her head at each word. "Now, Susie, what do you think of that?"

"What do I think of it? Why, that it isn't much. Where would you all have been, I wonder, if I had only had two thousand a year?"

"Oh, congratulate me!" cried Anna, opening her arms. "Kiss me, and tell me you are glad! Don't you see that I am off your hands at last? That we need never think about husbands again? That you will never have to buy me any more clothes, and never tire your poor little self out any more trotting me round? I don't know which of us is to be congratulated most," she added laughing, looking at Susie with her eyes full of tears. And then she insisted on kissing her again, and murmured foolish things in her ear about being so sorry for all her horrid ways, and so grateful to her, and so determined now to be good for ever and ever.

"My *dear* Anna," remonstrated Susie, who disliked sentiment, and never knew how to respond to

exhibitions of feeling. "Of course I congratulate you. It almost seems as if throwing away one's chances in the way you have done was the right thing to do, and is being rewarded. Don't let us waste time. You know we go out to dinner. What has he left Peter?"

"Peter?" said Anna wonderingly.

"Yes, Peter. He was his nephew, I suppose, just as much as you were his niece."

"Well, but Susie, Peter is different. He—he doesn't need money as I do; and of course Uncle Joachim knew that."

"Nonsense. He hasn't got a penny. Let me look at the letters."

"They're in German. You won't be able to read them."

"Give them to me. I learned German at school, and got a prize. You're not the only person in the world who can do things."

She took them out of Anna's hand, and began slowly and painfully to read the one from Uncle Joachim, determined to see whether there really was no mention of Peter. Anna looked on, hot and cold by turns with fright lest by some chance her early studies should not after all have been quite forgotten.

"Here's something about Peter—and me," Susie said suddenly. "At least, I suppose he means me.

It is something Dobbs. Why does he call me that? It hasn't been my name for fifteen years."

"Oh, it's some silly German way. He says the *geborene* Dobbs, to distinguish you from other Lady Estcourts."

"But there are no others."

"Oh, well, his sister was one. Give me the letter, Susie—I can tell you what he says much more quickly than you can read it."

"*„Unter der Würde einer jungen Dame aus guter Familie,“*" read out Susie slowly, not heeding Anna, and with the most excruciating pronunciation that was ever heard, "*„sich ewig auf den Federn, mit welchen die bürgerliche Gans geborene Dobbs Peter's sonst mangelhaftes Nest ausgestattet hat, zu wälzen."* What stuff he writes. I can hardly understand it. Yet I must have been good at it at school, to get the prize. What is that bit about me and Peter?"

"Which bit?" said Anna, blushing scarlet. "Let me look." She got the letter back into her possession. "Oh, that's where he says that—that he doesn't think it fair that I should be a burden for ever on you and Peter."

"Well, that's sensible enough. The old man had some sense in him after all, absurd though he was, and vulgar. It *isn't* fair, of course. I don't mean to say anything disagreeable, or throw all I have done

for you in your face, but really, Anna, few mothers would have made the sacrifices I have for you, and as for sisters-in-law—well, I'd just like to see another."

"Dear Susie," said Anna tenderly, putting her arm round her, ready to acknowledge all, and more than all, the benefits she had received, "you have been only too kind and generous. I know that I owe you everything in the world, and just think how lovely it is for me to feel that now I can take my weight off your shoulders! You must come and live with *me* now, whenever you are sick of things, and I'll feel so proud, having you in my house!"

"Live with you?" exclaimed Susie, drawing herself away, "Where are you going to live?"

"Why, there, I suppose."

"Live there! Is that a condition?"

"No, but Uncle Joachim keeps on saying he hopes I will, and that I'll settle down, and look after the place."

"Look after the place yourself? How silly."

"Yes, you haven't taught me much about farming, have you? He wants me to turn quite into a German."

"Good gracious!" cried Susie, genuinely horrified.

"He seems to think that I ought to work, and not spend my life talking *Klatsch*."

"Talking what?"

"It's what German women apparently talk when they get together. We don't. I'd never do anything with such an ugly name, and I'm positive you wouldn't."

"Where is this place?"

"Near Stralsund."

"And where on earth is that?"

"Ah," said Anna, investigating cobwebby corners of her memory, "that's what I should like to be able to remember. Perhaps," she added honestly, "I never knew. Let me call Letty, and ask her to bring her atlas."

"Letty won't know," said Susie impatiently; "she only knows the things she oughtn't to."

"Oh, she isn't as wise as all that," said Anna, ringing the bell. "Anyhow she has maps, which is more than we have."

A servant was sent to request Miss Letty Estcourt to attend in the drawing-room with her atlas.

"Whatever's in the wind now?" inquired Letty, open-mouthed, of her governess. "They're not going to examine me this time of night, are they, Leechy?" For she suffered greatly from having a brother who was always passing examinations and coming out top, and was consequently subjected herself, by an ambitious mother who was sure that she must be equally clever if she would only let herself go, to every

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examination that happened to be going for girls of her age; so that she and Miss Leech spent their days either on the defensive, preparing for these unprovoked assaults, or in the state of collapse which followed the regularly recurring defeat, and both found their lives a burden too great to be borne.

There was a preliminary scuffle of washing and brushing, and then Letty marched into the drawing-room, her atlas under her arm, and deep suspicion on her face. But no bland and treacherous examiner was visible, covering his preliminary movements with ghastly pleasantries; only her mother and her pretty aunt.

"Where's Stralsund?" they cried together, as she opened the door.

Letty stopped short and stared. "What's that?" she asked.

"It's a place—a place in Germany."
"Letty, do you mean to tell me that you don't know where Stralsund is?" asked Susie, in a voice that would have been of thunder if it had been big enough. "Do you mean to say that after all the money I have spent on your education you don't know that?"

Was this a new form of torture? Was she to find the examining spirit lurking even in the familiar and hitherto harmless forms of her mother and her

aunt? She openly showed her disgust. "If it's a place, it's in this atlas," she said, "and if this is going to be an examination, I don't think it's fair; and if it's a game, I don't like it." And she threw her atlas unceremoniously onto the nearest chair; for though her mother could force her to do many things, she could never, somehow, force her to be respectful.

"What a horror the child has of lessons!" cried Susie. "Don't be so silly. We only want to see if you know where Stralsund is, that's all."

"Tell us where it is, Letty," said Anna coaxingly, kneeling down in front of the chair and opening the atlas. "Let us find the map of Germany and look for it. Why, you did Germany for your last exam.—you must have it all at your fingers' ends."

"It didn't stay there, then," said Letty, moodily; but she went over to Anna, who was always kind to her, and began to turn over the well-thumbed pages.

Oh, what recollections lurked in those dirty corners! Surely it is hard on a person of fourteen, who is as fond of enjoying herself as anybody else, to be made to wrestle with maps upstairs in a dreary room, when the sun is shining, and the voices of the children passing come up joyously to the prison windows, and all the world is out of doors? Letty thought so, and Miss Leech thought it hard on a

person of thirty, and each tried to console the other, but neither knew how, for their case seemed very hopeless. Did not unending vistas of classes and lectures stretch away before and behind them, dotted at intervals, oh, so frequent! with the black spots of examinations? Was not the pavement of Gower Street, and Kensington Square, and of all those districts where girls can be lectured into wisdom, quite worn by their patient feet? And then the accomplishments! Oh, what a life it was! A man came twice a week and insisted on teaching her to fiddle; a highly nervous man, who jerked her elbow and rapped her knuckles with his bow whenever she played out of tune, which was all the time, and made bitter remarks of a killingly sarcastic nature to Miss Leech when she stumbled over the accompaniments. On Wednesdays there was a dancing-class, where a pinched young lady played the piano with the energy of despair, and a hot and agile master with unduly turned-out toes taught the girls the Lancers, earning his bread in the sweat of his brow. He also was sarcastic, but he clothed his sarcasms in the garb of kindly fun, laughing gently at them himself, and expecting his pupils to laugh too; which they did uneasily, for the fun was of a personal nature, evoked by the clumsiness or stupidity of one or other of them, and none knew when her own turn might not come. The lesson ended with what he called the

March of Grace round the room, each girl by herself, no music to drown the noise her shoes made on the bare boards, the others looking on, and the master making comments. This march was terrible to Letty. All her nightmares were connected with it. She was a podgy, dull-looking girl, fat and pale and awkward, and her mother made her wear cheap shoes that creaked. "Miss Estcourt has new shoes on again," the dancing master would say, gently smiling, when Letty was well on her way round the room, cut off from all human aid, conscious of every inch of her body, desperately trying to be graceful. And everybody tittered except the victim. "You know, Miss Estcourt," he would say at every second lesson, "there is a saying that creaking shoes have not been paid for. I beg your pardon? Did you say they had been paid for? Miss Estcourt says she does not know." And he would turn to his other pupils with a shrug and a gentle smile.

On Saturday afternoons there were the Popular Concerts at St. James's Hall to be gone to—Susie regarded them as educational, and subscribed—and Letty, who always had chilblains on her feet in winter, suffered tortures trying not to rub them; for as surely as she moved one foot and began to rub the other with it, however gently, fierce enthusiasts in the room in front would turn on her—old gentlemen of an otherwise humane appearance, rapt ladies with

eyeglasses and loose clothes—and sh-sh- her with furious hissings into immobility. “Oh, Letty, *try* and sit still,” Miss Leech, who dreaded publicity, would implore in a whisper; but who that has not had them can know the torture of chilblains inside thick boots, where they cannot be got at? As soon as the chilblains went, the Saturday concerts left off, and it seemed as though Fate had nothing better to do than to be spiteful.

It was indeed a dreadful thing, thought Letty, as she bent over the map of Germany, to be young and to have to be made clever at all costs. Here was her aunt even, her pretty, kind aunt, asking her geography questions at seven o'clock at night, when she thought that she had really done with lessons for one more day, and had been so much enjoying Leechy's description of the only man she ever loved, while she comfortably toasted cheese at the school-room fire. Anna, who spent such lofty hours of spiritual exaltation at St. Paul's and came away with her soul melted into pity for the unhappy, and yearned with her whole being to help them, never thought of Letty as a creature who might perhaps be helped to cheerfulness with a little trouble. Letty was too close at hand; and enthusiastic philanthropists, casting about for objects of charity, seldom see what is at their feet.

It was so difficult to find Stralsund that by the

time Letty's wandering finger had paused upon it Susie could only give one glance of horror at its position, and hurry away with Anna to dress. Anna, too, would have preferred it to be farther south, in the Black Forest, or some other romantic region, where it would have amused her to go occasionally, at least, for a few weeks in the summer. But there it was, as far north as it could be, in a part of the world she had hardly heard of, except in connection with dogs.

It did not, however, matter where it was. Uncle Joachim had merely recommended and not enjoined. It would be rather extraordinary for her to go there and set up housekeeping alone. She need not go; she was almost sure she would not go. Anyhow there was no necessity to decide at once. The money was what she wanted, and she could spend it where she chose. Let Uncle Joachim's inspector, of whom he wrote in such praise, go on getting forty thousand marks a year out of the place, and she would be perfectly content.

She ran upstairs to put on her prettiest dress, and to have her hair done in the curls and waves she had so long eschewed. Should she not make herself as charming as possible for this charming world, where everybody was so good and kind, and add her measure of beauty and kindness to the rest? She beamed on Letty as she passed her on the stairs,

climbing slowly up with her big atlas, and took it from her and would carry it herself; she beamed on Miss Leech, who was watching for her pupil at the schoolroom door; she beamed on her maid, she beamed on her own reflection in the glass, which indeed at that moment was that of a very beautiful young woman. Oh happy, happy world! What should she do with so much money? She, who had never had a penny in her life, thought it an enormous, an inexhaustible sum. One thing was certain—it was all to be spent in doing good; she would help as many people with it as she possibly could, and never, never, never let them feel that they were under obligations. Did she not know, after fifteen years of dependence on Susie, what it was like to be under obligations? And what was more cruelly sad and crushing and deadening than dependence? She did not yet know what sort of people she would help, or in what way she would help, but oh, she was going to make heaps of people happy for ever! While Hilton was curling her hair, she thought of slums; but remembered that they would bring her into contact with the clergy, and most of her offers of late had been from the clergy. Even the vicar who had prepared her for confirmation, his first wife being then alive, and a second having since been mourned, had wanted to marry her. "It's because I am twenty-five and staid that they think me suitable," she

thought; but she could not help smiling at the face in the glass.

When she was dressed and ready to go down she was forced to ask herself whether the person that she saw in the glass looked in the least like a person who would ever lead the simple, frugal, hard-working life that Uncle Joachim had called the better life, and in which he seemed to think she would alone find contentment. Certainly she knew him to be very wise. Well, nothing need be decided yet. Perhaps she would go—perhaps she would not. "It's this white dress that makes me look so—so unsuitable," she said to herself, "and Hilton's wonderful waves."

And she went downstairs trying not to sing, the sweetest of feminine creatures, happiness and love and kindness shining in her eyes, a lovely thing saved from the blight of empty years, and brought back to beauty, by Uncle Joachim's timely interference.

Letty and Miss Leech heard the singing, and stopped involuntarily in their conversation. It was a strange sound in that dull and joyless house.

"I don't know what's the matter, Leechy," Letty had said, on her return from the drawing-room, "but mamma and Aunt Anna are too weird to-night for anything. What do you think they had me down for? They didn't know where Stralsund was, and wanted to find out. They pretended they wanted to

see if *I* knew, but I soon saw through that game. And Aunt Anna looks frightfully happy. I believe she's going to be married, and wants to go to Stralsund for the honeymoon."

And Letty took up her toasting-fork while Miss Leech, as in duty bound, refreshed her pupil's memory in regard to Stralsund and Wallenstein and the Hansa cities generally.

CHAPTER IV.

PETER, meditating on the banks of the river at Estcourt, came to the conclusion that a journey to London would be made unnecessary by the equal efficacy of a congratulatory letter.

He had been greatly moved by the news of his sister's good fortune, and in the first flush of pleasure and sympathy had ordered his things to be packed in readiness for his departure by the night train. Then he had gone down to the river, and there, thinking the matter over quietly, amid the soothing influences of grey sky, grey water, and green grass, he gradually perceived that a letter would convey all that he felt quite well, perhaps better than any verbal expressions of joy, and as he would in any case only stay a few hours in town the long journey seemed hardly worth while. He sent a letter, therefore, that very evening—a kind, brotherly letter, in which, after heartily congratulating his dear little sister, he said that it would be necessary for her to go over to Germany, see the lawyer, and take possession of her property. When she had done that, and made all arrangements

as to the future payment of the income derived from the estate, she would of course come back to them; for Estcourt was always to be her home, and now that she was independent she would no longer be obliged to be wherever Susie was, but would, he hoped, come to him, and they could go fishing together,—“and there’s nothing to beat fishing,” concluded Peter, “if you want peace.”

But Anna did not want peace; at least, not that kind of peace just at that moment. Sitting in a punt was not what she wanted. She was thrilled by the love of her less fortunate fellow-creatures, and the sense of power to help them, and the longing to go and do it. What she really wanted of Peter was that he should take her to Germany and help her through the formalities; for before his letter arrived she too had seen that that was the first thing to be done.

Of this, however, he did not write a word. She thought he must have forgotten, so natural did it appear to her that her brother should go with her; and she wrote him a little note, asking when he would be able to get away. She received a long letter in reply, full of regrets, excuses, and good reasons, which she read wonderingly. Had she been selfish, or was Peter selfish? She thought it all out carefully, and found that it was she who had been selfish to expect Peter, always a hater of business and a

lover of quiet, to go all that way and worry himself with tiresome money arrangements. Besides, perhaps he was not feeling well. She knew he suffered from rheumatism; and when you have rheumatism the mere thought of a long journey is appalling.

Susie, whose head was very clear on all matters concerning money, had also recognised the necessity of Anna's going to Germany, and had also regarded Peter as the most natural companion and guide; but she was not surprised when Anna told her that he could not go. "It was too much to expect," apologised Anna. "He often has rheumatism in the spring, and perhaps he has it now."

Susie sniffed.

"The question is," said Anna after a pause, "what am I to do, helpless virgin, in spite of my years,—never able to do a thing for myself?"

"I'll go with you."

"You? But what about your engagements?"

"Oh, I'll throw them over, and take you. Letty can come too. It will do her German good. Herr Schumpf says he's ashamed of her."

Susie had various reasons for offering herself so amiably, one being certainly curiosity. But the chief one was that the same woman who had been so rude to her the day Anna's news came, had sent out invitations to all the world to her daughter's wedding after Easter, and had not sent one to Susie.

This was one of those trials that cannot be faced. If she, being in London at the time, carefully explained to her friends that she was ill that day, and did actually stay in bed and dose herself the days preceding and following, who would believe her? Not if she waved a doctor's certificate in their faces would they believe her. They would know that she had not been invited, and would rejoice. She felt that she could not bear it. An unavoidable business journey to the Continent was exactly what she wanted to help her out of this desperate situation. On her return she would be able to hear the wedding discussed and express her disappointment at having missed it with a serene brow and a quiet mind.

It is doubtful whether she would have gone with Anna, however urgent Anna's need, if she had been included in those invitations. But Anna, who could not know the secret workings of her mind, once more remembered her former treatment of Susie, so kind and willing to do all she could, and hung her head with shame.

They left London a day or two before Easter, Letty and Miss Leech, both of them nearly ill with suppressed delight at the unexpected holiday, going with them. They had announced their coming to Uncle Joachim's lawyer, and asked him to make arrangements for their accommodation at Kleinwalde, Anna's new possession. Susie proposed to stay a

day in Berlin, which would give Anna time to talk everything over with the lawyer, and would enable Letty to visit the museums. She had a hopeful idea that Letty would absorb German at every pore once she was in the country itself, and that being brought face to face with the statues of Goethe and Schiller on their native soil would kindle the sparks of interest in German literature that she supposed every well-taught child possessed, into the roaring flame of enthusiasm. She could not believe that Letty had no sparks. One of her children being so abnormally clever, it must be sheer obstinacy on the part of the other that prevented it from acquiring the knowledge offered daily in such unstinted quantities. She had no illusions in regard to Letty's person, and felt that as she would never be pretty it was of importance that she should at least be cultured. She sat opposite her daughter in the train, and having nothing better to do during the long hours that they were jolting across North Germany, looked at her; and the more she looked the more unreasoningly angry she became that Peter's sister should be so pretty and Peter's daughter so plain. And then so fat! What a horrible thing to have to take a fat daughter about with you in society. Where did she get it from? She herself and Peter were the leanest of mortals. It must be that Letty ate too much, which was not only a disgusting practice but an expensive one, and

should be put down at once with rigour. Susie had not had such an opportunity of thoroughly inspecting her child for years, and the result of this prolonged examination of her weak points was that she would not let any of the party have anything to eat at all, declaring that it was vulgar to eat in trains, expressing amazement that people should bring themselves to touch the horrid-looking food offered, and turning her back in impatient disgust on two stout German ladies who had got in at Oberhausen, and who were enjoying their lunch quite unmoved by her contempt—one eating a chicken from beginning to end without a fork, and the other taking repeated sips of an obviously satisfactory nature from a big wine-bottle which was used, in the intervals, as a support to her back.

By the time Berlin was reached, these ladies, having been properly fed all day, were very cheerful, whereas Susie's party was speechless from exhaustion; especially poor Miss Leech, who was never very strong, and so nearly fainted that Susie was obliged to notice it, and expressed a conviction to Anna in a loud and peevish aside that Miss Leech was going to be a nuisance.

"It is strange," thought Anna, as she crept into bed, "how travelling brings out one's worst passions."

It is indeed strange; for it is certain that nothing equals the expectant enthusiasm and mutual esteem

of the start except the cold dislike of the finish. Many are the friendships that have found an unforeseen and sudden end on a journey, and few are those that survive it. But if Horace Walpole and Gray fell out, if Byron and Leigh Hunt were obliged to part, if a host of other personages, endowed with every gift that makes companionship desirable, could not away with each other after a few weeks together abroad, is it to be wondered at that weaker vessels such as Susie and Anna, Letty and Miss Leech, should have found the short journey from London to Berlin sufficient to enable them to see one another's failings with a clearness of vision that was startling?

On the lawyer, a keen-eyed man with a conspicuously fine face, Anna made an entirely favourable impression. When he saw this gracious young lady, so simple and so friendly, and looked into her frank and charming eyes, he perfectly understood that old Joachim should have been bewitched. But after a little conversation, it appeared that she had no present intention of carrying out her uncle's wishes, but, setting them coolly aside, proposed to spend all the good German money she could extract from her property in that replete and bloated land, England.

This annoyed him; first because he hated England and then because his father had managed old Joachim's affairs before he himself had stepped into

the paternal shoes, and the feeling of both father and son for the old man had been considerably warmer than is usual between lawyer and client. Still he could not believe, judging after the manner of men, that anything so pretty could also be unkind; and scrutinising Lady Estcourt, because she was unattractive, and had a sharp little face and a restless little body, he was convinced that she it was who was the cause of this setting aside of a dead benefactor's wishes. Susie, for her part, patronised him because his collar turned down.

Whenever Letty thought afterwards of Berlin, she thought of it as a place where all the houses are museums, and where you drink so many cups of chocolate with whipped cream on the top that you see things double for the rest of the time.

Anna thought of it as a charming place, where delightful lawyers fill your purse with money.

Susie thought of it with satisfaction as the one place abroad where, by dint of sternest economy, walks from sight to sight in the rain, and promiscuous cakes instead of the more satisfactory but less cheap meals Letty called square, she had successfully defended herself from being, as she put it, fleeced.

To Miss Leech, it was merely a place where your feet get wet, and your clothes are spoilt.

Early the next morning they started for Kleinwalde.

CHAPTER V.

STRALSUND is an old town of gabled houses, ancient churches, and quaint, roughly-paved streets, forming an island, and joined to the mainland by dykes. It looks its best in the early summer, when the green and marshy plains on whose edge it stands are strewn with kingcups, and the little white clouds hang over them almost motionless, and the cattle are out, and the larks sing, and the orange and red sails of the fishing-smacks on the narrow belt of sea that divides the town from the island of Rügen make brilliant points of contrasting colour between the blue of water and sky. There is a divine freshness and brightness about the surrounding stretches of coarse grass and common flowers at that blest season of the year. The air is full of the smell of the year. The sun beats down fiercely on plain and city. The people come out of the rooms in which most of their life is spent, and stand in the doorways and remark on the heat. An occasional heavy cart bumps over the stones, heard in that sleepy place for several minutes before and after its passing. There is an

honest, tarry, fishy smell everywhere; and the traveller of poetic temperament in search of the picturesque, and not too nice about his comforts, could not fail, visiting it for the first time in the month of June, to be wholly delighted that he had come.

But in winter, and especially in those doubly gloomy days at the end of winter, when spring ought to have shown some signs of its approach and has not done so, those days of howling winds and driving rain and frequent belated snowstorms, this plain is merely a bleak expanse of dreariness, with a forlorn old town huddling in its farthest corner.

It was at its very bleakest and dreariest on the morning that Susie and her three companions travelled across it. "What a place!" exclaimed Susie, as mile after mile was traversed, and there was still the same succession of flat ploughed fields, marshes, and ploughed fields again, with a rare group of furiously swaying pine-trees or of silver birches bent double before the wind. "What a part of the world to come and live in! That old uncle of yours was as cracked as he could be to think you'd ever stay here for good. And imagine spending even a single shilling buying land here. I wouldn't take a barrowful at a gift."

"Well, I am taking a great many barrowfuls," said Anna, "and I am sure Uncle Joachim was right to buy a place here—he was always right."

"Oh, of course, it's your duty now to praise him up. Perhaps it gets better farther on, but I don't see how anybody can squeeze two thousand a year out of a desert like this."

The prospect from the railway that day was certainly not attractive; but Anna told herself that any place would look dreary in such weather, and was much too happy in the first flush of independence to be depressed by anything whatever. Had she not that very morning given the chambermaid at the Berlin hotel so bounteous a reward for services not rendered that the woman herself had said it was too much? Thus making amends for those innumerable departures from hotels when Susie had escaped without giving anything at all. Had she not also asked, and readily obtained, permission of Susie at the station in Berlin to pay for the tickets of the whole party? And had it not been a delightful and warming feeling, buying those tickets for other people instead of having tickets bought by other people for herself? At Pasewalk, a little town half-way between Berlin and Stralsund, where the train stopped ten minutes, she insisted on getting out, defying the sleet and the puddles, and went into the refreshment-room, and bought eggs and rolls and cakes,—everything she could find that was least offensive. Also a guide-book to Stralsund, though she was not going to stop in Stralsund; also some postcards with views on them,

though she never used postcards with views on them, and came back loaded with parcels, her face glowing with childish pleasure at spending money.

"My *dear* Anna," said Susie; but she was hungry, and ate a roll with perfect complacency, allowing Letty to do the same, although only two days had elapsed since she had so energetically lectured her on the grossness of eating in trains.

Susie was in a particularly amiable frame of mind, and in spite of the weather was looking forward to seeing the place Uncle Joachim had thought would be a fit home for his niece; and as she and Anna were sitting together at one end of the carriage, and Letty and Miss Leech were at the other, and there was no one else in the compartment, she was neither upset by the too near contemplation of her daughter, nor by the aspect of other travellers lunching. Miss Leech, always mindful of her duties, was making the most of her five hours' journey by endeavouring, in a low voice, to clear away the haze that hung in her pupil's mind round the details of her last winter's German studies. "Don't you remember anything of Professor Smith's lectures, Letty?" she inquired. "Why, they were all about just this part of Germany, and it makes it so much more interesting if one knows what happened at the different places. Stralsund, you know, where we shall be presently, has had a most turbulent and interesting past."

"Has it?" said Letty. "Well, I can't help it, Leechy."

"No, but my dear, you should try to recollect something at least of what you heard at the lectures. Have you forgotten the paper you wrote about Wallenstein?"

"I remember I did a paper. Beastly hard it was, too."

"Oh, Letty, don't say beastly—it really isn't a ladylike word."

"Why, mamma's always saying it."

"Oh, well. Don't you know what Wallenstein said when he was besieging Stralsund and found it such a difficult task?"

"I suppose he said too that it was beastly hard."

"Oh, Letty—it was something about chains. Now do you remember?"

"Chains?" repeated Letty, looking bored. "Do *you* know, Leechy?"

"Yes, I still remember that, though I confess that I have forgotten the greater part of what I heard."

"Then what do you ask me for, when you know I don't know? What did he say about chains?"

"He said that he'd take the city, if it were riveted to heaven with chains of iron," said Miss Leech dramatically.

"What a goat."

"Oh, hush—don't say those horrible words. Where do you learn them? Not from me, certainly not from me," said Miss Leech, distressed. She had a profound horror of slang, and was bewildered by the way in which these weeds of rhetoric sprang up on all occasions in Letty's speech.

"Well, and was it?"

"Was it what, my dear?"

"Chained to heaven?"

"The city? Why, how can a city be chained to heaven, Letty?"

"Then what did he say it for?"

"He was using a metaphor."

"Oh," said Letty, who did not know what a metaphor was, but supposed it must be something used in sieges, and preferred not to inquire too closely.

"He was obliged to retire," said Miss Leech, "leaving enormous numbers of slain on the field."

"Poor beasts. I say, Leechy," she whispered, "don't let's bother about history now. Go on with Mr. Jessup. You'd got to where he called you Amy for the first time."

Mr. Jessup was the person already alluded to in these pages as the only man Miss Leech had ever loved, and his history was of absorbing interest to Letty, who never tired of hearing his first appearance

on Miss Leech's horizon described, with his subsequent advances before the stage of open courting was reached, the courting itself, and its melancholy end; for Mr. Jessup, a clergyman of the Church of England, with a vicarage all ready to receive his wife, had suddenly become a prey to new convictions, and had gone over to the Church of Rome; whereupon Miss Leech's father, also a clergyman of the Church of England, had talked a great deal about the Scarlet Woman of Babylon, and had shut the door in Mr. Jessup's face when next he called to explain. This had happened when Miss Leech was twenty. Now, at thirty, an orphan resigned to the world's buffets, she found a gentle consolation in repeating the story of her ill-starred engagement to her keenly interested friend and pupil; and the oftener she repeated it the less did it grieve her, till at last she came actually to enjoy the remembrance of it, pleased to have played the principal part even in a drama that was hissed off her little stage, glad to find a sympathetic listener, dwelling much and fondly on every incident of that short period of importance and glory.

It is doubtful whether she would ever have extracted the same amount of pleasure from Mr. Jessup had he remained fixed in the faith of his fathers and married her in due season. By his secession he had unconsciously become a sort of providence to Letty and herself, saving them from endless hours of dulness,

furnishing their lonely schoolroom life with romance and mystery; and if in Miss Leech's mind he gradually took on the sweet intangibility of a pleasant dream, he was the very pith and marrow of Letty's existence. She glowed and thrilled at the thought that perhaps she too would one day have a Mr. Jessup of her own, who would have convictions, and give up everything, herself included, for what he believed to be right.

As usual, they at once became absorbed in Mr. Jessup, forgetting in the contemplation of his excellencies everything else in the world, till they were roused to realities by their arrival at Stralsund; and Susie, thrusting books and bags and umbrellas into their passive hands, pushed them out of the carriage into the wet.

Hilton, the maid shared by Susie and Anna, had then to be found and urged to clamber down quickly onto the low platform, where she stood helplessly, the picture of injured superiority, hustled by the hurrying porters and passengers, out of whose way she scorned to move, while Anna went to look for the luggage and have it put into the cart that had been sent for it.

This cart was an ordinary farm cart, used for bringing in the hay in June, but also used for carrying out the manure in November; and on a sack of straw lying in the bottom it was expected that Hilton

should sit. The farm-boy who drove it, and who helped the porter to tie the trunks to its sides lest they should too violently bump against each other and Hilton on the way, said so; the coachman of the carriage waiting for the *Herrschaften* pointed with his whip first at Hilton and then at the cart, and said so; the porter, who seemed to think it quite natural, said so; and everybody was waiting for Hilton to get in, who, when she had at length grasped the situation, went to Susie, who was looking frightened and pretending to be absorbed by the sky, and with a voice shaken by passion, and a face changing from white to red, announced her intention of only going in that cart as a corpse, when they might do with her as they pleased, but as a living body with breath in it, never.

Here was a difficulty. And idlers, whose curiosity was not extinguishable by wind and sleet, began to press round, and people who had come by the same train stopped on their way out to listen. The farm-boy patted the sack and declared that it was clean straw, the coachman stood up on his box and swore that it was a new sack, the porter assured the *Fräulein* that it was as comfortable as a feather bed, and nobody seemed to understand that what she was being offered was an insult.

Susie was afraid of Hilton, who had been in the service of duchesses, and who held these duchesses

over her mistress's head whenever her mistress wanted to do anything that was inconvenient to herself; quoting their sayings, pointing out how they would have acted in any given case, and always, it appeared, they had done exactly what Hilton desired. Susie's admiration for duchesses was slavish, and Hilton was treated with an indulgent liberality that was absurd compared to the stinginess displayed towards everyone else. Hilton was not more horrified than her mistress when she saw the farm cart, and understood that it was for the luggage and the maid. It was impossible to take her with them in what the porter called the *herrschaftliche Wagen*, for it was a kind of victoria, and how to get their four selves into it was a sufficient puzzle. "What shall we do?" said Susie in despair, to Anna.

"Do? Why, she'll have to go in it. Hilton, don't be a foolish person, and don't keep us here in the wet. This isn't England, and nobody thinks anything here of driving in farm carts. It is patriarchal simplicity, that's all. People are staring at you now because you are making such a fuss. Get in like a good soul, and let us start."

"Only as a corpse, ma'am," reiterated Hilton with chattering teeth, "never as a living body."

"Nonsense," said Anna impatiently.

"What shall we do?" repeated Susie. "Poor Hilton—what barbarians they must be here."

"We must send her in a *Droschky*, then, if it isn't too far, and we can get one to go."

"A *Droschky* all that distance! It will be ruinous."

"Well, we can't stand here amusing these people for ever."

"Oh, I wish we had never come to this horrible place!" cried Susie, really made miserable by Hilton's rage.

But Anna did not stay to listen either to her laments or to Hilton's monotonous "Only as a corpse, m'lady," and was already arranging with an unwilling driver, who had no desire whatever to drive to Kleinwalde, but consented to do so on being promised twenty marks, a rest and feed of oats for his horses, and any little addition in the shape of refreshment and extra money that might suggest itself to Anna's generosity.

"You know, Anna, you can't expect *me* to pay for the fly," said Susie uneasily, when the appeased Hilton had been put into it and was out of earshot. "That dreadful cart is your property, I suppose."

"Of course it is," said Anna, smiling, "and of course the fly is my affair. How magnificent I feel, disposing of carts and *Droschkas*. Now, will you please to get into my carriage? And do you observe the extreme respectfulness of my coachman?"

The coachman, a strange-looking, round-shouldered

being, with a long grizzled beard, a dark-blue cloth cap on his head, and a body clothed in a fawn-coloured suit and gaiters, on which a great many tarnished silver buttons adorned with Uncle Joachim's coat of arms were fastened at short intervals, removed his cap while his new mistress and her party were entering the carriage, and did not put it on again till they were ready to start.

"Quite as though we were royalties," said Susie.

"But the rest of him isn't," replied Anna, who was greatly amused by the turn-out. "Do you like my horses, Susie? Or do you suspect them of having been ploughing all the morning? Oh, well," she added quickly, ashamed of laughing at any part of her dear uncle's gift, "I suppose one has to have heavily-built horses in this part of the world, where the roads are probably frightfully bad."

"Their tails might be a little shorter," said Susie.

"They might," agreed Anna serenely.

With the aid of the porter, who knew all about Uncle Joachim's will and was deeply interested, they were at last somehow packed into the carriage, and away they rattled over the rough stones, threading the outskirts of the town on the mainland, the hail and wind in their faces, out into the open country, with their horses' heads turned towards the north. The fly containing Hilton followed more leisurely be-

hind, and the farm cart containing the unused sack of straw followed the fly.

"We can't see much of Stralsund," said Anna, trying to peep round the hood at the old town across the lakes separating it from the mainland.

"It's a very historical town," observed Susie, who had happened to notice, as she idly turned over the pages of her Baedeker on the way down, that there was a long description of it with dates. "As of course you know," she added, turning sharply to her daughter.

"Rather," said Letty. "Wallenstein said he'd take it if it were chained to heaven, and when he found it wasn't he was frightfully sick, and went away and left them all in the fields."

Miss Leech, who was on the little seat, struggling to defend herself from the fury of the elements with an umbrella, looked anxious, but Susie only said in a gratified voice, "I'm glad you remember what you've been taught." To which Letty, who was in great spirits, and thought this drive in the wet huge fun, again replied heartily, "Rather," and her mother congratulated herself on having done the right thing in bringing her to Germany, home of erudition and profundity, already evidently beginning to do its work.

The carriage smelt of fish, which presently upset Susie, who, unfortunately for her, had a nose that

smelt everything. While they were in the town she thought the smell was in the streets, and bore it; but out in the open, where there was not a house to be seen, she found that it was in the carriage.

She fidgeted, and looked about, feeling with her foot under the opposite seat, expecting to find a basket somewhere, and determined if she found one to push it out quietly and say nothing; for that she should drive for two hours with her handkerchief up to her nose was more than anybody could expect of her. Already she had done more than anybody ought to expect of her, she reflected, in going to the expense of the journey and the inconvenience of the absence from home for Anna's sake, and she hoped that Anna felt grateful. She had never yet shrunk from her duty towards Anna, or indeed from her duty towards anyone, and she was sure she never would; but her duty certainly did not include the passive endurance of offensive smells.

"What are you looking for?" asked Anna.

"Why, the fish."

"Oh, do you smell it too?"

"Smell it? I should think I did. It's killing me."

"Oh, poor Susie!" laughed Anna, who was possessed by an uncontrollable desire to laugh at everything. The conveyance (it could hardly be called a carriage) in which they were seated, and which she

supposed was the one destined for her use if she lived at Kleinwalde, was unlike anything she had yet seen. It was very old, with enormous wheels, and bumped dreadfully, and the seat was so constructed that she was continually slipping forward and having to push herself back again. It was lined throughout, including the hood, with a white and black shepherd's plaid in large squares, the white squares mellowed by the stains of use and time to varying shades of brown and yellow; when Miss Leech's umbrella was blown aside by a gust of wind Anna could see her coachman's drab coat, with a little end of white tape that he had forgotten to tie, and whose uses she was unable to guess, fluttering gaily between its tails in the wind; on the left side of the box was a very big and gorgeous coat of arms in green and white, Uncle Joachim's colours; and whichever way she turned her head, there was the overpowering smell of fish. "We must be taking our 'dinner home with us," she said, "but I don't see it anywhere."

"There isn't anything under the seats. Perhaps the man has got it on the box. Ask him, Anna; I really can't stand it."

Anna did not quite know how to attract his attention. It seemed undignified to poke him, but she did not know his name, and the wind blew her voice back in the direction of Stralsund when she had

cleared it, and coughed, and called out rather shyly, "Oh, *Kutscher! Kutscher!*"

Then she remembered that oh was not German, and that Uncle Joachim had used sonorous *achs* in its place, and she began again, "*Ach, Kutscher! Kutscher!*"

Letty giggled. "Go it, Aunt Anna," she said encouragingly, "dig him in the ribs with your umbrella—or I will, if you like."

Her mother, with her handkerchief to her nose, exhorted her not to be vulgar. Letty explained at some length that she was only being nice, and offering assistance.

"I really shall have to poke him," said Anna, her faint cries of *Kutscher* quite lost in the rattling of the carriage and the howling of the wind. "Or perhaps you would touch his arm, Miss Leech."

Miss Leech turned, and very gingerly touched his sleeve. He at once whistled to his horses, who stopped dead, snatched off his cap, and looking down at Anna inquired her commands.

It was done so quickly that Anna, whose conversational German was exceedingly rusty, was quite unable to remember the word for fish, and sat looking up at him helplessly, while she vainly searched her brains.

"What *is* fish in German?" she said, appealing

to Susie, distressed that the man should be waiting capless in the rain.

"Letty, what's the word for fish?" inquired Susie sternly.

"Fish?" repeated Letty, looking stupid.

"Fish?" echoed Miss Leech, trying to help.

"*Fisch?*" said the coachman himself, catching at the word.

"Oh yes; how utterly silly I am," cried Anna blushing and showing her dimples, "it's *Fisch*, of course. *Kutscher, wo ist Fisch?*"

The man looked blank; then his face brightened, and pointing with his whip to the rolling sea on their right, visible across the flat intervening fields, he said that there was much fish in it, especially herrings.

"What does he say?" asked Susie from behind her handkerchief.

"He says there are herrings in the sea."

"Is the man a fool?"

Letty laughed uproariously. The coachman, seeing Letty and Anna laugh, thought he must have said the right thing after all, and looked very pleasant.

"*Aber im Wagen,*" persisted Anna, "*wo ist Fisch im Wagen?*"

The coachman stared. Then he said vaguely, in a soothing voice, not in the least knowing what

she meant, "*Nein, nein, gnädiges Fräulein,*" and evidently hoped she would be satisfied.

"*Aber es riecht, es riecht!*" cried Anna, not satisfied at all, and lifting up her nose in unmistakable displeasure.

His face brightened again. "*Ach so—jawohl, jawohl,*" he exclaimed cheerfully; and hastened to explain that there were no fish nearer than the sea, but that the grease he had used that morning to make the leather of the hood and apron shine certainly had a fishy smell, as he himself had noticed. "The gracious Miss loves not the smell?" he inquired anxiously; for he had seven children, and was very desirous that his new mistress should be pleased.

Anna laughed and shook her head, and though she said with great emphasis that she did not love it at all, she looked so friendly that he felt reassured.

"What does he say?" asked Susie.

"Why, I'm afraid we shall have it all the way. It's the grease he's been rubbing the leather with."

"Barbarian!" cried Susie angrily, feeling sick already, and certain that she would be quite ill by the end of the drive. "And you laugh at him and encourage him, instead of taking up your position at once and showing him that you won't stand any nonsense. He ought to be—to be unboxed!" she added in great wrath; for she had heard of delin-

quent clergymen being unfrocked, and why should not delinquent coachmen be unboxed?

Anna laughed again. She tried not to, but she could not help it; and Susie, made still more angry by this childish behaviour, sulked during the rest of the drive.

"Go on—*avanti!*" said Anna, who knew hardly any Italian, and when she was in Italy and wanted her words never could find them, but had been troubled the last two days by the way in which these words came to her lips every time she opened them to speak German.

The coachman understood her, however, and they went on again along the straight highroad, that stretched away before them to a distant bend. The highroad, or *chaussée*, was planted on either side with maples, and between the maples big white-washed stones had been set to mark the way at night, and behind the rows of trees and stones, ditches had been dug parallel with the road as a protection to the crops in summer from the possible wanderings of erring carts. If a cart erred, it tumbled into the ditch. The arrangement was simple and efficacious. On the right, across some marshy land, they could see the sea for a little while, with the flat coast of Rügen opposite; and then some rising ground, bare of trees and brilliantly green with winter corn, hid it from view. On the left was the

dreary plain, dotted at long intervals with farms and their little groups of trees, and here and there with windmills working furiously in the gale. The wind was icy, and the December snow still lay in drifts in the ditches. In that leaden landscape, made up of grey and brown and black, the patches of winter rye were quite startling in their greenness.

Susie thought it the most God-forsaken country she had ever seen, and expressed this opinion plainly on her face and in her attitudes without any need for opening her lips, shuddering back ostentatiously into her corner, wrapping herself with elaborate care in her furs, and behaving as slaves to duty sometimes do when the paths they have to tread are rough.

After driving along the *chaussée* for about an hour, they passed a big house standing among trees back from the road on the right, and a little farther on came to a small village. The carriage pulled up with a jerk, and looking eagerly round the hood Anna found they had come to a standstill in front of a new red-brick building, whose steps were crowded with children. Two or three men and some women were with the children. Two of the men appeared to be clergymen, and the elder, a middle-aged, mild-faced man, came down the steps, and bowing profoundly proceeded to welcome Anna solemnly, on behalf of those children from Kleinwalde who attended this school, to her new home. He concluded

that Anna was the person to be welcomed because he could see nothing of the lady in the other corner but her eyes, and they looked anything but friendly; whereas the young lady on the left was leaning forward and smiling and holding out her hand.

He took it, and shook it slowly up and down, while he begged her to allow the hood of the carriage to be put back, so that the children from her village, who had walked three miles to welcome her, might be able to see her; and on Anna's readily agreeing to this, himself helped the coachman with his own white-gloved hands to put it down. Susie was therefore exposed to the full fury of the blast, and shrank still farther into her corner—an interesting and tantalising object to the schoolchildren, a dark, mysterious combination of fur, cocks' feathers, and black eyebrows.

Then the clergyman, hat in hand, made a speech. He spoke distinctly, as one accustomed to speaking often and long, and Anna understood every word. She was wholly taken aback by these ceremonies, and had no idea of what she should say in reply, but sat smiling vaguely at him, looking very pretty and very shy. She soon found that her smiles were inappropriate, and they died away; for, warming as he proceeded, the parson, it appeared, was taking it for granted that she intended to live on her property, and was eloquently descanting on the comfort she

was going to be to the poor, assuring those present that she would be a mother to the sick, nursing them with her tender woman's hands, an angel of mercy to the hungry, feeding them in the hour of their distress, a friend and sister to the little children, succouring them, caring for them, pitiful of their weakness and their sins. His face lit up with enthusiasm as he went on, and Anna was thankful that Susie could not understand. This crowd of children, the women, the young parson, her coachman, were all hearing promises made on her behalf that she had no thought of fulfilling. She looked down, and twisted her fingers about nervously, and felt uncomfortable.

At the end of his speech, the parson, his eyes full of the tears drawn forth by his own eloquence, held up his hand and solemnly blessed her, rounding off his blessing with a loud Amen, after which there was an awkward pause. Susie heard the Amen, and guessed that something in the nature of a blessing was being invoked, and made a movement of impatience. The parson was odious in her eyes, first because he looked like the ministers of the Baptist chapels of her unmarried youth, but principally because he was keeping her there in the gale and prolonging the tortures she was enduring from the smell of fish. Anna did not know what to say after the Amen, and looked up more shyly than ever, and

stammered in her confusion *Danke sehr*, hoping that it was a proper remark to make; whereupon the parson bowed again, as one who should say Pray don't mention it. Then another man, evidently the schoolmaster, took out a tuning-fork, gave out a note, and the children sang a *Choral*, following it up with other more cheerful songs, in which the words *Frühling* and *Willkommen* were repeated a great many times, while the wind howled flattest contradiction.

When this was over, the parson begged leave to introduce the other clerical-looking person, a tall narrow youth, also in white kid gloves, buttoned up tightly in a long coat of broadcloth, with a pallid face and thick, upright flaxen hair.

"Herr Vicar Klutz," said the elder parson, with a wave of the hand; and the Herr Vicar, making his bow, and having his limp hand heartily grasped by that other little hand, and his furtive eyes smiled into by those other friendly eyes, became on the spot desperately enamoured; which was very natural, seeing that he had not spoken to a woman under forty for six months, and was himself twenty and a poet. He spent the rest of the afternoon shut up in his bedroom, where, refusing all nourishment, he composed a poem in which *berauschten Sinn* was made to rhyme with *Engländerin*, while the elder parson, in whose house he lived, thought he was writing his Good Friday sermon.

Then the schoolmaster was introduced, and then came the two women—the schoolmaster's wife and the parson's wife; and when Anna had smiled and murmured polite and incoherent little speeches to each in turn, and had nodded and bowed at least a dozen times to each of these ladies, who could by no means have done with their curtsies, and had introduced them to the dumb figure in the corner, during which ceremonies Letty stared round-eyed and open-mouthed at the schoolchildren, and the schoolchildren stared round-eyed and open-mouthed at Letty, and Miss Leech looked demure, and Susie's brows were contracted by suffering, she wondered whether she might not now with propriety continue her journey, and if so whether it were expected that she should give the signal.

Everybody was smiling at everybody else by way of filling up this pause of hesitation, except Susie, who shut her eyes with great dignity, and shivered in so marked a manner that the parson himself came to the rescue, and bade the coachman help him put up the hood again, explaining to Anna as he did so that her *Frau Schwester* was not used to the climate.

Evidently the moment had come for going on, and the bows that had but just left off began again with renewed vigour. Anna was anxious to say something pleasant at the finish, so she asked the

parson's wife, as she bade her good-bye, whether she and her husband would come to Kleinwalde the next day to dinner.

This invitation produced a very deep curtsy and a flush of gratification, but the recipient turned to her lord before accepting it, to inquire his pleasure.

"I fear not to-morrow, gracious Miss," said the parson, "for it is Good Friday."

"*Ach ja*," stammered Anna, ashamed of herself for having forgotten.

"*Ach ja*," exclaimed the parson's wife, still more ashamed of herself for having forgotten.

"Perhaps Saturday, then?" suggested Anna.

The parson murmured something about quiet hours preparatory to the Sabbath; but his wife, a person who struck Anna as being quite extraordinarily stout, was burning with curiosity to examine those foreign ladies more conveniently, and especially to see what manner of being would emerge from the pile of fur and feathers in the corner; and she urged him, in a rapid aside, to do for once without quiet hours. Whereupon he patted her on the cheek, smiled indulgently, and said he would make an exception and do himself the honour of appearing.

This being settled, Anna said *Gehen Sie* to her coachman, who again showed his intelligence by understanding her; and in a cloud of smiles and

bows they drove away, the schoolgirls making curtseys, the schoolboys taking off their caps, and the parson standing hat in hand with his arm round his wife's waist as serenely as though it had been a summer's day and no one looking.

Anna became used to these displays of conjugal regard in public later on; but this first time she turned to Susie with a laugh, when the hood had hidden the group from view, and asked her if she had seen it. But Susie had seen nothing, for her eyes were shut, and she refused to answer any questions otherwise than by a feeble shake of the head.

On the other side of the village the *chaussée* came to an end, and two deep, sandy roads took its place. There was a sign-post at their junction, one arm of which, pointing to the right-hand road that ran down close to the sea, had Kleinwalde scrawled on it; and beside this sign-post a man on a horse was waiting for them.

"Good gracious! More rot?" ejaculated Susie as the carriage stopped again, shaken out of the dignity of sulks by these repeated shocks.

"Oberinspector Dellwig," said the man, introducing himself, and sweeping off his hat and bowing lower and more obsequiously than anyone had yet done.

"This must be the inspector Uncle Joachim hoped I'd keep," said Anna in an undertone.

"I don't care who he is, but for heaven's sake don't let him make a speech. I can't stand this sort of thing any longer. You'll have me ill on your hands if you're not careful, and you won't like *that*, so you had better stop him."

"I can't stop him," said Anna, perplexed. She also had had enough of speeches.

"*Gestatten gnädiges Fräulein, dass ich meine gehorsamste Ehrerbietung ausspreche,*" began the glib inspector, bowing at every second word over his horse's ears.

There was no escape, and they had to hear him out. The man had prepared his speech, and say it he would. It was not so long as the parson's, but was quite as flowery in another way, overflowing with respectful allusions to the deceased master, and with expressions of unbounded loyalty, obedience, and devotion to the new mistress.

Susie shut her eyes again when she found he was not to be stopped, and gave herself up for lost. What could Hilton, who must be close behind waiting in the cold, uncomforted by any food since leaving Berlin, think of all this? Susie dreaded the moment when she would have to face her.

The inspector finished all he had intended saying, and then, assuming a more colloquial tone, informed Anna that from the sign-post onward she would be driving through her own property, and

asked permission to ride by her side the rest of the way. So they had his company for the last two miles and his conversation, of which there was much; for he had a ready tongue, and explained things to Anna in a very loud voice as they went along, expatiating on the magnificence of the crops the previous summer, and assuring her that the crops of the coming summer would be even more magnificent, for he had invented a combination of manures which would give such results that all Pomerania's breath would be taken away.

The road here was terrible, and the horses could hardly drag the carriage through the sand. It lurched and heaved from side to side, creaking and groaning alarmingly. Miss Leech was in imminent peril. Anna held on with both hands, and hardly had leisure to put in appropriate *achs* and *jas* and questions of a becoming intelligence when the inspector paused to take breath. She did not like his looks, and wished that she could follow Susie's example and avoid the necessity of seeing him by the simple expedient of shutting her eyes. But somehow, she did not quite know how, responsibilities and obligations were suddenly pressing heavily upon her. These people had all made up their minds that she was going to be and do certain things; and though she assured herself that it did not in the least matter how they had made up their minds, yet she felt obliged to

behave in the way that was expected of her. She did not want to talk to this unpleasant-looking man, and what he told her about the crops and their marvellousness was half unintelligible to her and wholly a bore. Yet she did talk to him, and looked friendly, and affected to understand and be deeply interested in all he said.

They passed through a plantation of young beeches, planted, Dellwig explained, by Uncle Joachim on his last visit; and after a few more yards of lurching in the sand came to some woods and got onto a fair road.

"The park," said Dellwig superbly, with a wave of the hand.

Susie opened her eyes at the word park, and looked about. "It isn't a park," she said peevishly; "it's a forest—a horrid, gloomy, damp wilderness."

"Oh, it's lovely!" cried Letty, giving a jump of delight as she peered down the serried ranks of pine-trees.

It was a thick wood of pines and beeches, railed off from the road on either side by wooden rails painted in black and white stripes. Uncle Joachim had been the loyalest of Prussians, and his loyalty overflowed even into his fences. Æsthetic instincts he had none, and if he had been brought to see it, would not have cared at all that the railings made the otherwise beautiful avenue look like the entrance

to a restaurant or a railway station. The stripes, renewed every year, and of startling distinctness, were an outward and visible sign of his staunch devotion to the King of Prussia, the very lining of the carriage with its white and black squares was symbolic; and when they came to the gate within which the house itself stood, two Prussian eagles frowned down at them from the gate-posts.

CHAPTER VI.

A low, white, two-storied house, separated from the forest only by a circular grass plot and a ditch with half-melted snow in it and muddy water, a house apparently quite by itself among the creaking pines, neither very old nor very new, with a great many windows, and a brown-tiled roof, was the home bestowed by Uncle Joachim on his dear and only niece Anna.

"So *this* is where I was to lead the better life?" she thought, as the carriage drew up at the door, and the moaning of the uneasy trees, and all the lonely sounds of a storm-beaten forest replaced the rattling of the wheels in her ears. "The better life, then, is a life of utter solitude, Uncle Joachim thought? I wish I knew—I wish I knew——" But what it was she wished she knew was hardly clear in her mind; and her thoughts were interrupted by a very untidy, surprised-looking maidservant, capless, and in felt slippers, who had darted down the steps and was unfastening the leather apron and pulling out the rugs with hasty, agitated hands, and trying to pull Susie out as well.

The doorway was garlanded with evergreen wreaths, over which a green and white flag flapped; and curtsying and smiling beneath the wreaths stood Dellwig's wife, a short lady with smooth hair, weather-beaten face, and brown silk gloves, who would have been the stoutest person Anna had ever seen if she had not just come from the presence of the parson's wife.

"I never saw so many bows in my life," grumbled Susie, pushing the servant aside, and getting out cautiously, feeling very stiff and cold and miserable. "Letty, you are on my dress—oh, how d'you do—how d'you do," she murmured frostily, as the Frau Inspector seized her hand and began to talk German to her. "Anna, are you coming? This—er—person thinks I'm you, and is making me a speech."

Dellwig, who had sent his horse away in charge of a small boy, rapidly explained to his wife that the young lady now getting out of the carriage was their late master's niece, and that the other one must be the sister-in-law mentioned in the lawyer's letter; upon which Frau Dellwig let Susie go, and transferred her smiles and welcome to Anna. Susie went into the house to get out of the cold, only to find herself in a square hall whose iciness was the intolerable iciness of a place in which no sun had been

allowed to shine and no windows had been opened for summers without number. When Uncle Joachim came down he lived in two rooms at the back of the house, with a door leading into the garden through which he went to the farm, and the hall had never been used, and the closed shutters never opened. There was no fireplace, or stove, or heating arrangement of any sort. Glass doors divided it from an inner and still more spacious hall, with a wide wooden staircase, and doors all round it. The walls in both halls were painted grass-green; and from little chains in the ceiling stuffed hawks and eagles, shot by Uncle Joachim, and grown with years very dusty and moth-eaten, hung swinging in the draught. The floor was boarded, and was still damp from a recent scrubbing. There was no carpet. A wooden bracket on the wall, with brass hooks, held a large assortment of whips and hunting-crops; and in one corner stood an arrangement for coats, with Uncle Joachim's various waterproofs and head-coverings hanging monumentally on its pegs.

"Oh, how dreadful!" thought Susie, shivering more violently than ever. "And what a musty smell—it's damp, of course, and I shall be laid up. Poor Hilton! What will she think of this? Oh, how d'you do," she added aloud, as a female figure in a white apron suddenly emerged from the gloom and took her hand and kissed it; "Anna, who's this?"

Anna! Aren't you coming? Here's somebody ~~using~~ my hand."

"It's the cook," said Anna, coming into the inner hall with the others, Dellwig and his wife keeping one on either side of her, and both talking at once in their anxiety to make a good impression.

"The cook? Then tell her to give us some food. I shall die if I don't have something soon. Do you know what time it is? Past four. Can't you get rid of these people? And where's Hilton?"

Susie hardly seemed to see the Dellwigs, and talked to Anna while they were talking to her as though they did not exist. If Anna felt an obligation to be polite to these different persons she felt none at all. They did not understand English, but if they had it would not have mattered to her, and she would have gone on talking about them as though they had not been there.

Both the Dellwigs had very loud voices, so Susie had to raise hers in order to be heard, and there was consequently such a noise in the empty, echoing house, that after looking round bewildered, and trying to answer everybody at once, Anna gave it up, and stood and laughed.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," said Susie crossly; "we are all starving, and these people won't go."

"But how can I make them go?"

"They're your servants, I suppose. I should just say that I'd send for them when I wanted them."

"They'd be very much astonished. The man is so far from being my servant that I believe he means to be my master."

The two Dellwigs, perplexed by Anna's laughter when nobody had said anything amusing, and uneasy lest she should be laughing at something about themselves, looked from her to Susie suspiciously, and for that brief moment were quiet.

"*Wir sind hungrig*," said Anna to the wife.

"The food comes immediately," she replied; and hastened away with the cook and the other servant through a door evidently leading to the kitchen.

"*Und kalt*," continued Anna plaintively to the husband, who at once flung open another door, through which they saw a table spread for dinner. "*Bitte, bitte*," he said, ushering them in as though the place belonged to him.

"Does this person live in the house?" inquired Susie, eyeing him with little goodwill.

"He told me he lives at the farm. But of course he has always looked after everything here."

When they were all in the dining-room, driven in by Dellwig, as Susie remarked, like a flock of sheep by a shepherd determined to stand no nonsense, he helped them with officious politeness to take off their wraps, and then, bowing almost to

the ground, asked permission to withdraw while the *Herrschaften* ate—a permission that was given with alacrity, Anna's face falling, however, upon his informing her that he would come round later on in order to lay his plans for the summer before her.

"What does he say?" asked Susie, as the door shut behind him.

"He's coming round again later on."

"That man's going to be a nuisance—you see if he isn't," said Susie with conviction.

"I believe he is," agreed Anna, going over to the white porcelain stove to warm her hands.

"He's the limpet, and you're going to be the rock. Don't let him fleece you too much."

"But limpets don't fleece rocks," said Anna.

"He wouldn't be able to fleece me, I know, if I could talk German as well as you do. But you'll be soft and weak and amiable, and he'll do as he likes with you."

"Soft, and weak, and amiable!" repeated Anna, smiling at Susie's adjectives. "Why, I thought I was obstinate—you always said I was."

"So you are. But you won't be to that man. He'll get round you."

"Uncle Joachim said he was excellent."

"Oh, I daresay he wasn't bad with a man over him who knew all about farming, but mark my

words, *you* won't get two thousand a year out of the place."

Anna was silent. Susie was invariably shrewd and sensible, if inclined, Anna thought, to be over-suspicious, in matters where money was concerned. Dellwig's face was not one to inspire confidence: and his way of shouting when he talked, and of talking incessantly, was already intolerable to her. She was not sure, either, that his wife was any more satisfactory. She too shouted, and Anna detested noise. The wife did not appear again, and had evidently gone home with her husband, for a great silence had fallen upon the house, broken only by the monotonous sighing of the forest, and the pattering of rain against the window.

The dining-room was a long, narrow room, with one big window forming its west end, looking out on-to the grass plot, the ditch, and the gate-posts with the eagles on them. It was a study in chocolate—brown paper, brown carpet, brown rep curtains, brown cane chairs. There were two wooden side-boards painted brown facing each other down at the dark end, with a collection of miscellaneous articles on them: a vinegar-cruet that had stood there for years, with remains of vinegar dried up at the bottom; mustard-pots containing a dark and wicked mixture that had once been mustard; a broken hand-bell used at long-past dinners, to summon

servants long since dead; an old wine-register with entries in it of a quarter of a century back; a mouldy bottle of Worcester sauce, still boasting on its label that it would impart a relish to viands otherwise dull; and some charming Dresden china fruit-dishes, adorned with cheerful shepherds and shepherdesses, incurable optimists, persistently pleased with themselves and their surroundings through all the days and nights of all the cold, silent years that they had been smiling at each other in the dark. On the round dinner-table was a pot of lilies of the valley, enveloped in crinkly pink tissue paper tied round with pink satin ribbon, with ears of the paper drawn up between the flower-stalks to produce a pleasing contrast of pink and white.

"Well, it's warm enough here, isn't it?" said Susie, going round the room and examining these things with an interest far exceeding that called forth by the art treasures of Berlin.

"Rather," said Letty, answering for everybody, and rubbing her hands. She frolicked about the room, peeping into all the corners, opening the cupboards, trying the sofa, and behaving in so frisky a fashion that her mother, who seldom saw her at home, and knew her only as a naughty, gloomy girl, turned once or twice from the interesting sideboards to stare at her inquiringly through her lorgnette.

The servant with the surprised eyebrows, who

presently brought in the soup, had put on a pair of white cotton gloves for the ceremony of waiting, but still wore her felt slippers. She put the plates in a pile on the edge of the table, murmured something in German, and ran out again; nor did she come back till she brought the next course, when she behaved in a precisely similar manner, and continued to do so throughout the meal; the diners, having no bell, being obliged to sit patiently during the intervals, until she thought that they might perhaps be ready for some more.

It was an odd meal, and began with cold chocolate soup with frothy white things that tasted of vanilla floating about in it. Susie was so much interested in this soup that she forgot all about Hilton, who had been driven ignominiously to the back-door and was left sitting in the kitchen till the two servants should have time to take her upstairs, and was employing the time composing a speech of a spirited nature in which she intended giving her mistress notice the moment she saw her again.

Her mistress meanwhile was meditatively turning over the vanilla balls in her soup. "Well, I don't like it," she said at last, laying down her spoon.

"Oh, it's ripping!" cried her daughter ecstatically. "It's like having one's pudding at the other end."

"How can you look at chocolate after Berlin,

greedy girl?" asked her mother, disgusted by her child's obvious tendency towards a too free indulgence in the pleasures of the table. But Letty was feeling so jovial that in the face of this question she boldly asked for more—a request that was refused indignantly and at once.

There was such a long pause after the soup that in their hunger they began to eat the stewed apples and bottled cherries that were on the table. The brown bread, arranged in thin slices on a white crotchet mat in a japanned dish, felt so damp and was so full of caraway seeds that it was uneatable. After awhile some roach, caught on the estate, and with a strong muddy flavour and bewildering multitudes of bones, was brought in; and after that came cutlets from Anna's pigs; and after that a queer red gelatinous pudding that tasted of physic; and after that, the meal being evidently at an end, Susie, who was very hungry, remarked that if all the food were going to be like those specimens they had better return at once to England, or they would certainly be starved. "It's a good thing you are not going to stay here, Anna," she said, "for you'd have to make a tremendous fuss before you'd get them to leave off treating you like a pig. Look here—tea-spoons to eat the pudding with, and the same fork all the way through. It's a beastly hole"—Letty's eyebrows telegraphed triumphantly across to Miss Leech, "Well,

did you hear that?"—"and we ought to have stayed in Berlin. There was nothing to be gained at all by coming here."

"Perhaps the dinner to-night will be better," said Anna, trying to comfort her, and little knowing that they had just eaten the dinner; but people who are hungry are surprisingly impervious to the influence of fair words. "It couldn't be worse, anyhow, so it really will probably be better. I'm very glad though that we did come, for I like it."

"Oh yes, so do I, Aunt Anna!" cried Letty. "It's frightfully nice. It's like a picnic that doesn't leave off. When are we going over the house, and out into the garden? I do so want to go—oh, I do so want to go!" And she jumped up and down impatiently on her chair, till her ardour was partially quenched by her mother's forbidding her to go out of doors in the rain. "Well, let's go over the house, then," said Letty, dying to explore.

"Oh yes, you may go over the house," said her mother with a shrug of displeasure; though why she should be displeased it would have puzzled anyone who had dined satisfactorily to explain. Then she suddenly remembered Hilton, and with an exclamation started off in search of her.

The others put on their furs before going into the Arctic atmosphere of the hall, and began to explore, spending the next hour very pleasantly rambling all

over the house, while Susie, who had found Hilton, remained shut up in the bedroom allotted her till supper-time.

The cook showed Anna her bedroom, and when she had gone Anna gave one look round at the evergreen wreaths with which it was decorated and which filled it with a pungent, baked smell, and then ran out to see what her house was like. Her heart was full of pride and happiness as she wandered about the rooms and passages. The magic word *mine* rang in her ears, and gave each piece of furniture a charm so ridiculously great that she would not have told anyone of it for the world. She took up the different irrelevant ornaments that were scattered through the rooms, collected as such things do collect, nobody knew when or why, and she put them down again somewhere else, only because she had the right to alter things and she loved to remind herself of it. She patted the walls and the tables as she passed; she smoothed down the folds of the curtains with tender touches; she went up to every separate looking-glass and stood in front of it a moment, so that there should be none that had not reflected the image of its mistress. She was so childishly delighted with her scanty possessions that she was thankful Susie remained invisible and did not come out and scoff.

What if it seemed an odd, bare place to eyes used to the superfluity of hangings and stuffings that

prevailed at Estcourt? These bare boards, these shabby little mats by the side of the beds, the worn foxes' skins before the writing-tables, the cane or wooden chairs, the white calico curtains with meek cotton fringes, the queer little prints on the walls, the painted wooden bedsteads, seemed to her in their very poorness and unpretentiousness to be emblematical of all the virtues. As she lingered in the quiet rooms, while Letty raced along the passages, Anna said to herself that this Spartan simplicity, this absence of every luxury that could still further soften an already languid and effeminate soul, was beautiful. Here, as in the whitewashed praying-places of the Puritans, if there were any beauty and any glory it must all come from within, be all of the spirit, be only the beauty of a clean life and the glory of kind thoughts. She pictured herself waking up in one of those unadorned beds with the morning sun shining on her face, and rising to go her daily round of usefulness in her quiet house, where there would be no quarrels, and no pitiful ambitions, and none of those many bitter heartaches that need never be. Would they not be happy days, those days of simple duties? "The better life—the better life," she repeated musingly, standing in the middle of the big room through whose tall windows she could see the garden, and a strip of marshy land, and then the grey sea and the white of the gulls and the dark line of the Rügen

coast over which the dusk was gathering; and she counted on her fingers mechanically, "Simplicity, frugality, hard work. Uncle Joachim said *that* was the better life, and he was wise—oh, he was very wise—but still—— And he loved me, and understood me, but still——"

Looking up she caught sight of herself in a long glass opposite, a slim figure in a fur cloak, with bare head and pensive eyes, lost in reflection. It reminded her of the day the letter came, when she stood before the glass in her London bedroom dressed for dinner, with that same sentence of his persistently in her ears, and how she had not been able to imagine herself leading the life it described. Now, in her travelling-dress, pale and tired and subdued after the long journey, shorn of every grace of clothes and curls, she criticised her own fatuity in having held herself to be of too fine a clay, too delicate, too fragile, for a life that might be rough. "Oh, vain and foolish one!" she said aloud, apostrophising the figure in the glass with the familiar *Du* of the days before her mother died, "Art thou then so much better than others, that thou must for ever be only ornamental and an expense? Canst thou not live, except in luxury? Or walk, except on carpets? Or eat, except thy soup be not of chocolate? Go to the ants, thou sluggard; consider their ways, and be wise." And she wrapped herself

in her cloak, and frowned defiance at that other girl.

She was standing scowling at herself with great disapproval when the housemaid, who had been searching for her everywhere, came to tell her that the Herr Oberinspector was downstairs, and had sent up to know if his visit were convenient.

It was not at all convenient; and Anna thought that he might have spared her this first evening at least. But she supposed that she must go down to him, feeling somehow unequal to sending so authoritative a person away.

She found him standing in the inner hall with a portfolio under his arm. He was blowing his nose, making a sound like the blast of a trumpet, and waking the echoes. Not even that could he do quietly, she thought, her new sense of proprietorship oddly irritated by a nose being blown so aggressively in her house. Besides, they were her echoes that he was disturbing. She smiled at her own childishness.

She greeted him kindly, however, in response to his elaborate obeisances, and shook hands on seeing that he expected to be shaken hands with, though she had done so twice already that afternoon; and then she let herself be ushered by him into the drawing-room, a room on the garden side of the house,

with French windows, and bookshelves, and a huge round polished table in the middle.

It had been one of the two rooms used by Uncle Joachim, and was full of traces of his visits. She sat down at a big writing-table with a green cloth top, her feet plunged in the long matted hairs of a grey rug, and requested Dellwig to sit down near her, which he did, saying apologetically, "I will be so free."

The servant, Marie, brought in a lamp with a green shade, shut the shutters, and went out again on tiptoe; and Anna settled herself to listen with what patience she could to the loud voice that jarred so on her nerves, fortifying herself with reminders that it was her duty, and really taking pains to understand him. Nor did she say a word, as she had done to the lawyer, that might lead him to suppose she did not intend living there.

But Dellwig's ceaseless flow of talk soon wearied her to such an extent that she found steady attention impossible. To understand the mere words was in itself an effort, and she had not yet learned the German for rye and oats and the rest, and it was of these that he chiefly talked. What was the use of explaining to her in what way he had ploughed and manured and sown certain fields, how they lay, how big they were, and what their soil was, when she had not seen them? Did he imagine that she could

keep all these figures and details in her head? "I know nothing of farming," she said at last, "and shall understand your plans better when I have seen the estate."

"*Natürlich, natürlich,*" shouted Dellwig, his voice in strangest contrast to hers, which was particularly sweet and gentle. "Here I have a map—does the gracious Miss permit that I show it?"

The gracious Miss inclined her tired head, and he unrolled it and spread it out on the table, pointing with his fat forefinger as he explained the boundaries, and the divisions into forest, pasture, and arable.

"It seems to be nearly all forest," said Anna.

"Forest! The forest covers two-thirds of the estate. It is the only forest on the entire promontory. Such care as I have bestowed on the forest has seldom been seen. It is *grossartig—colossal!*" And he lifted his hands the better to express his admiration, and was about to go into lengthy raptures when the map rolled itself up again with loud cracklings, and cut him short. He spread it out once more, and securing its corners began to describe the effects of the various sorts of artificial manure on the different crops, his cleverness in combining them, and his latest triumphant discovery of the superlative mixture that was to strike all Pomerania with awe.

"*Ja,*" said Anna, balancing a paper-knife on one

finger, and profoundly bored. "Whose land is that next to mine?" she asked, pointing.

"The land on the north and west belongs to peasants," said Dellwig. "On the east is the sea. On the south it is all Lohm. The gracious one passed through the village of Lohm this afternoon."

"The village where the school is?"

"Quite correct. The pastor, Herr Manske, a worthy man, but, like all pastors, taking ells when he is offered inches, serves both that church and the little one in Kleinwalde village, of which the gracious Miss is patroness. Herr von Lohm, who lives in the house standing back from the road, and perhaps noticed by the gracious Miss, is Amtsvorsteher in both villages."

"What is Amtsvorsteher?" asked Anna, languidly. She was leaning back in her chair, idly balancing the paper-knife, and listening with half an ear only to Dellwig, throwing in questions every now and then when she thought she ought to say something. She did not look at him, preferring much to look at the paper-knife, and he could examine her face at his ease in the shadow of the lamp-shade, her dark eye-lashes lowered, her profile only turned to him, with its delicate line of brow and nose, and the soft and gracious curves of the mouth and chin and throat. One hand lay on the table in the circle of light, a slender, beautiful hand, full of character and energy,

and the other hung listlessly over the arm of the chair. Anna was very tired, and showed it in every line of her attitude; but Dellwig was not tired at all, was used to talking, enjoyed at all times the sound of his voice, and on this occasion felt it to be his duty to make things clear. So he went into the lengthiest details as to the nature and office of Amtsvorstehers, details that were perfectly incomprehensible and wholly indifferent to Anna, and spared neither himself nor her. While he talked, however, he was criticising her, comparing the laziness of her attitude with the brisk and respectful alertness of other women when he talked. He knew that these other women belonged to a different class; his wife, the parson's wife, the wives of the inspectors on other estates, these were not, of course, in the same sphere as the new mistress of Kleinwalde; but she was only a woman, and dress up a woman as you will, call her by what name you will, she is nothing but a woman, born to help and serve, never by any possibility even equal to a clever man like himself. Old Joachim might have lounged as he chose, and put his feet on the table if it had seemed good to him, and Dellwig would have accepted it with unquestioning respect as an eccentricity of *Herrschaften*; but a woman had no sort of right, he said to himself, while he so fluently discoursed, to let herself go in the presence of her natural superior. Unfortunately old Joachim,

so level-headed an old gentleman in all other respects, had placed the power over his fortunes in the hands of this weak female leaning back so unbecomingly in her chair, playing with the objects on the table, never raising her eyes to his, and showing indeed, incredible as it seemed, every symptom of thinking of something else. The women of his acquaintance were, he was certain, worth individually fifty such affected, indifferent young ladies. They worked early and late to make their husbands comfortable; they were well practised in every art required of women living in the country; they were models of thrift and diligence; yet, with all their virtues and all their accomplishments, they never dreamed of lounging or not listening when a man was speaking, but sat attentively on the edge of their chairs, straight in the back and seemly, and when he had finished said *Jawohl*.

Anna certainly did sit very much at her ease, and instead of attending, as she ought to have done, to his description of Amtsvorstehers, was thinking of other things. Dellwig had thick lips that could not be hidden entirely by his grizzled moustache and beard, and he had the sort of eyes known to the inelegant but truthful as fishy, and a big obstinate nose, and a narrow obstinate forehead, and a long body and short legs; and though all this, Anna told herself, was not in the least his fault and should not

in any way prejudice her against him, she felt that she was justified in wishing that his manners were less offensive, less boastful and boisterous, and that he did not bite his nails. "I wonder," she thought, her eyes carefully fixed on the paper-knife, but conscious of his every look and movement,—“I wonder if he is as artful as he looks. Surely Uncle Joachim must have known what he was like, and would never have told me to keep him if he had not been honest. Perhaps he is perfectly honest, and when I meet him in heaven how ashamed I shall be of myself for having had doubts!” And then she fell to musing on what sort of an appearance a chastened and angelic Dellwig would probably present, and looked up suddenly at him with new interest.

“I trust I have made myself comprehensible?” he was asking, having just come to the end of what he felt was a masterly *résumé* of Herr von Lohm’s duties.

“I beg your pardon?” said Anna, bringing her thoughts back with difficulty from the consideration of nimbuses, “Oh, about Amtsvorsteher—no,” she said, shaking her head, “you have not. But that is my fault. I can’t understand everything at once. I shall do better later on.”

“*Natürlich, natürlich,*” Dellwig vehemently assured her, while he made inward comments on the innate incapacity of all *Weiber*, as he called them,

to grasp the simplest fact connected with law and justice.

"Tell me about the livestock," said Anna, remembering Uncle Joachim's frequent and affectionate allusions to his swine. "Are there many pigs?"

"Pigs?" repeated Dellwig, lifting up his hands as though mere words were insufficient to express his feelings. "Such pigs as the gracious Miss now possesses are nowhere else to be found in Pomerania. They are the pride, and at the same time the envy, of the whole province. 'Let my sausages,' said the Herr Regierungspräsident last winter, when the time for killing drew near,—'let my sausages consist solely of the pigs reared at Kleinwalde by my friend the Oberinspector Dellwig.' The Frau Regierungspräsidentin was deeply injured, for she too breeds and fattens pigs, but not like ours—not like ours."

"Who is the Herr Regierungspräsident?" asked Anna absently; but immediately remembering the description of the Amtsvorsteher she added quickly "Never mind—don't explain. I suppose he is some sort of an official, and I shall not be quite clear about these different officials till I have lived here some time."

"*Natürlich, natürlich,*" agreed Dellwig; and leaving the Regierungspräsident unexplained he launched forth into a dissertation on Anna's pigs, whose excellencies, it appeared, were wholly due to the unrivalled

skill he had for years displayed in their treatment. "I have no children," he said, with a resigned and pious upward glance, "and my wife's maternal instincts find their satisfaction in tending and fattening these fine animals. She cannot listen to their cries the day they are killed, and withdraws into the cellar, where she prepares the stuffing. The gracious Miss ate the cutlets of one this very day. It was killed on purpose."

"Was it? I wish it hadn't been," said Anna, frowning at the remembrance of that meal. "I—I don't want things killed on my account. I—don't like pig."

"Not like pig?" echoed Dellwig, dropping his lower jaw in his amazement. "Did I understand aright that the gracious one does not eat pig's flesh gladly? And my wife and I who thought to prepare a joy for her!" He clasped his hands together and stared at her in dismay. Indeed, he was so much overcome by this extraordinary and wilful spurning of nature's best gifts that for a moment he was silent, and knew not how he should proceed. Were there not concentrated in the body of a single pig a greater diversity of joys than in any other form of pleasure that he could call to mind? Did it not include, besides the profounder delights of its roasted ribs, such solid satisfactions as hams, sausages, and

bacon? Did not its liver, discreetly manipulated, rival the livers of Strasburg geese in delicacy? Were not its brains a source of mutual congratulation to an entire family at supper? Did not its very snout, boiled with peas, make an otherwise inferior soup delicious? The ribs of this particular pig were reposing at that moment in a cool place, carefully shielded from harm by his wife, reserved for the Easter Sunday dinner of their new mistress, who, having begun at her first meal with the lesser joys of cutlets, was to be fed with different parts in the order of their excellence till the climax of rejoicing was reached on Easter Day in the dish of *Schweinebraten*, and who was now declaring, in a die-away, affected sort of voice, that she did not want to eat pig at all. Where, then, was her vulnerable point? How would he ever be able to touch her, to influence her, if she was indifferent to the chief means of happiness known to the dwellers in those parts? That was the real aim and end of his labours, of the labours, as far as he could see, of everyone else—to make as much money as possible in order to live as well as possible; and what did living well mean if it did not mean the best food? And what was the best food if not pig? Not to be killed on her account! On whose account, then, could they be killed? With an owner always about the place, and refusing to have pigs killed, how would he and his wife be

able to indulge, with satisfactory frequency, in their favourite food, or offer it to their expectant friends on Sundays? He mourned old Joachim, who so seldom came down, and when he did ate his share of pork like a man, more sincerely at that moment than he would have thought possible. "*Mein seliger Herr,*" he burst out brokenly, completely upset by the difference between uncle and niece, "*mein seliger Herr——*" And then, unable to go on, fell to blowing his nose with violence, for there were real tears in his eyes.

Anna looked up, surprised. She thought he had been speaking of pigs, and here he was on a sudden bewailing his late master. When she saw the tears she was deeply touched. "Poor man," she said to herself, "how unjust I have been. Of course he loved dear Uncle Joachim; and my coming here, an utter stranger, taking possession of everything, must be very dreadful for him." She got up, at once anxious, as she always was, to comfort and soothe anyone who was sad, and put her hand gently on his arm. "I loved him too," she said softly, "and you who knew him so long must feel his death dreadfully. We will try and keep everything just as he would have liked it, won't we? You know what his wishes were, and must help me to carry them out. You cannot have loved him more than I did—dear Uncle Joachim!"

She felt very near tears herself, and condoned the sonorous nose-blowing as the expression of an honourable emotion.

And Dellwig, when he presently reached his home and was met at the door by his wife's eager "Well, how was she?" laconically replied "Mad."

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Anna woke next morning she had a confused idea that something annoying had happened the evening before, but she had slept so heavily that she could not at once recollect what it was. Then, the sun on her face waking her up more thoroughly, she remembered that Susie had stayed upstairs with Hilton till supper-time, had then come down, glanced with unutterable disgust at the raw ham, cold sausage, eggs, and tepid coffee of which the evening meal was composed, refused to eat, refused to speak, refused utterly to smile, and afterwards in the drawing-room had announced her fixed intention of returning to England the next day.

Anna had protested and argued in vain; nothing could shake this sudden determination. To all her expostulations and entreaties Susie replied that she had never yet dwelt among savages, and she was not going to begin now; so Anna was forced to conclude that Hilton had been making a scene, and knowing the effect of Hilton's scenes she gave up attempting to persuade, but told her with outward firmness and

inward quakings that she herself could not possibly go too.

Susie had been very angry at this, and still more angry at the reason Anna gave, which was that, having invited the parson and his wife to dinner on Saturday, she could not break her engagement. Susie told her that as she would never see either of them again—for surely she would never again want to come to this place?—it was absurd to care twopence what they thought of her. What on earth did it matter if two inhabitants of the desert were offended or not offended once she was on the other side of the sea? And what did it matter at all how she treated them? She heaped such epithets as absurd, stupid, and idiotic, on Anna's head, but Anna was not to be moved. She threatened to take Miss Leech and Letty away with her, and leave Anna a prey to the criticisms of Mrs. Grundy, and Anna said she could not prevent her doing so if she chose. Susie became more and more excited, more and more Dobbs, goaded by the recollection of what she had gone through with Hilton, and Anna, as usual under such circumstances, grew very silent. Letty sat listening in an agony of fright lest this cup of new experiences was about to be dashed prematurely from her eager lips; and Miss Leech discreetly left the room, though not in the least knowing where to go, finally seeking to drive away the nervous fears

that assailed her in her lonely, creaking bedroom, where rats were gnawing at the woodwork, by thinking hard of Mr. Jessup, who on this occasion proved to be but a broken reed, pitted against the stern reality of rats.

The end of it, after Susie had poured out the customary reproaches of gross ingratitude and forgetfulness of all she had done for Anna for fifteen long years, was that Miss Leech and Letty were to stay on as originally intended, and come home with Anna towards the end of the holidays, and Susie would leave with Hilton the very next day.

Anna's attempt to make it up when she said good-night was repulsed with energy. Anna was for ever doing aggravating things, and then wanting to make it up; but makings up without having given in an inch seemed to Susie singularly unsatisfactory ceremonies. Oh, these Estcourts and their obstinacy! She marched off to bed in high indignation—an indignation not by any means allowed to cool by Hilton during the process of undressing; and Anna, worn out, fell asleep the moment she lay down, and woke up, as she had pictured herself doing in that odd wooden bed, with the morning sun shining full on her face.

It was a bright and lovely day, and on the side of the house where she slept she could not hear the

wind, which was still blowing from the north-west. She opened one of her three big windows and let the cold air rush into her room, where the curious perfume of the baked evergreen wreaths festooned round the walls and looking-glass and dressing-table, joined to the heat from the stove, produced a heavy atmosphere that made her gasp. Somebody must already have been in her room, for the stove had been lit again, and she could see the peat blazing inside its open door. But outside, what a divine coldness and purity! She leaned out, drinking it in long breaths, the warm March sun shining on her head. The garden, a mere uncared-for piece of rough grass with big trees, was radiant with rain-drops; the strip of sea was a deep blue now, with crests of foam; the island coast opposite was a shadowy streak stretched across the feet of the sun. Oh, it was beautiful to stand at that open window in the freshness, listening to the robin on the bare lilac-bush a few yards away, to the quarrelling of the impudent sparrows on the path below, to the wind in the branches of the trees, to all the happy morning sounds of nature. A joyous feeling took possession of her heart, a sudden overpowering delight in what are called common things—mere earth, sky, sun, and wind. How lovely life was on such a morning, in such a clean, rain-washed, wind-scoured world. The wet smell of the garden came up to her, a whiff of

marshy smell from the water, a long breath from the pines in the forest on the other side of the house. How had she ever breathed at Estcourt? How had she escaped suffocation without this life-giving smell of sea and forest? She looked down with delight at the wildness of the garden; after the trim Estcourt lawns, what a relief this was. This was all liberty, freedom from conventionality, absolute privacy; that was an everlasting clipping, and trimming, and raking, a perpetual stumbling upon gardeners at every step, for Susie would not be outdone by her greater neighbours in these matters. What was Hill Street looking like this fine March morning? All the blinds down, all the people in bed—how far away, how shadowy it was; a street inhabited by sleepy ghosts, with phantom milkmen rattling spectral cans beneath their windows. What a dream that life lived up to three days ago seemed in this morning light of reality. White clouds, like the clouds in Raphael's backgrounds, were floating so high overhead that they could not be hurried by the wind; a black cat sat in a patch of sunshine on the path washing itself; somebody opened a lower window, and there was a noise of sweeping, presently made indistinguishable by the chorale sung by the sweeper, no doubt Marie, in a pious, Good Friday mood. "*Lobt Gott ihr Christen allzugleich,*" chanted Marie, keeping time with her broom. Her voice was loud and monoton-

ous, but Anna listened with a smile, and would have liked to join in, and so let some of her happiness find its way out.

She dressed quickly. There was no hot water, and no bell to ring for some, and she did not choose to call down from the window and interrupt the hymn, so she used cold water, assuring herself that it was bracing. Then she put on her hat and coat and stole out, afraid of disturbing Susie, who was lying a few yards away filled with smouldering wrath, anxious to have at least one quiet hour before beginning a day that she felt sure was going to be a day of worries. "There will be great peace to-night when she is gone," she thought, and immediately felt ashamed that she should look forward to being without her. "But I have never been without her since I was ten," she explained apologetically to her offended conscience, "and I want to see how I feel."

"*Guten Morgen*," said Marie, as Anna came into the drawing-room on her way out through its French windows.

"*Guten Morgen*," said Anna cheerfully.

Marie leaned on her broom and watched her go down the garden, greedily taking in every detail of her clothes, profoundly interested in a being who went out into the mud where nobody could see her

with such a dress on, and whose shoes would not have been too big for Marie's small sister aged nine.

The evening before, indeed, Marie had beheld such a vision as she had never yet in her life seen, or so much as imagined; her new mistress had appeared at supper in what was evidently a *herrschaftliches Ballkleid*, with naked arms and shoulders, and the other ladies were attired in much the same way. The young Fräulein, it is true, showed no bare flesh, but even she was arrayed in white, and her hair magnificently tied up with ribbons. Marie had rushed out to tell the cook, and the cook, refusing to believe it, had carried in a supererogatory dish of compot as an excuse for securing the assurance of her own eyes; and Bertha from the farm, coming round with a message from the Frau Oberinspector, had seen it too through the crack of the kitchen door as the ladies left the dining-room, and had gone off breathlessly to spread the news; and the post-cart just leaving with the letters had carried it to Lohm, and every inhabitant of every house between Kleinwalde and Stralsund knew all about it before bedtime. "What did I tell thee, wife?" said Dellwig, who, in spite of his superiority to the sex that served, listened as eagerly as any member of it to gossip; and his wife was only too ready to label Anna mad or eccentric as a slight private consolation for having passed



out of the service of a comprehensible German gentleman into that of a woman and a foreigner.

Unconscious of the interest and curiosity she was exciting for miles round, pleased by Marie's artless piety, and filled with kindly feelings towards all her neighbours, Anna stood at the end of the garden looking over the low hedge that divided it from the marsh and the sea, and thought that she had never seen a place where it would be so easy to be good. Complete freedom from the wearisome obligations of society, an ideal privacy surrounded by her woods and the water, a scanty population of simple and devoted people—did not Dellwig shed tears at the remembrance of his master?—every day spent here would be a day that made her better—that would bring her nearer to that heaven in which all good and simple souls dwelt while still on earth, the heaven of a serene and quiet mind. Always she had longed to be good, and to help and befriend those who had the same longing, but in whom it had been partially crushed by want of opportunity and want of peace. The healthy goodness that goes hand in hand with happiness was what she meant; not that tragic and futile goodness that grows out of grief, that lifts its head miserably in stony places, that flourishes in sick-rooms and among desperate sorrows, and goes to God only because all else is lost. She went round the house and crossed the road into the forest. The

fresh wind blew in her face, and shook down the drops from the branches on her as she passed. The pine-needles of other years made a thick carpet for her feet. The sun gleamed through the straight trunks and warmed her. The restless sighing overheard in the tree-tops filled her ears with sweetest music. "I do believe the place is pleased that I have come!" she thought, with a happy laugh. She came to a clearing in the trees, opening out towards the north, and she could see the flat fields and the wide sky and the sunshine chasing the shadows across the vivid green patches that she had learned were winter rye. A hole at her feet, where a tree had been uprooted, still had snow in it; but the larks were singing above in the blue, as though from those high places they could see Spring far away in the south, coming up slowly with the first anemones in her hands, her face turned at last towards the patient north.

The strangest feeling of being for the first time in her life at home came over Anna. This poor country, how sweet and touching it was. After the English country, with its thickly-scattered villages, and gardens, and fields that looked like parks, it did seem very poor and very empty, but intensely lovable. Like the furniture of her house, it struck her as symbolic in its bareness of the sturdier virtues. The people who lived in it must of necessity be frugal

and hard-working if they would live at all, wrestling by sheer labour their life from the soil, braced by the long winters to endurance and self-denial, their vices and their languors frozen out of them whether they would or no. At least so thought Anna, as she stood gazing out across the clearing at the fields and sky. "Could one not be good here? Could one not be so, so good?" she kept on murmuring. Then she remembered that she had been asking herself vague questions like this ever since her arrival; and with a sudden determination to face what was in her mind and think it out honestly, she sat down on a tree-stump, buttoned her coat up tight, for the wind was blowing full on her, and fell to considering what she meant to do.

Susie did not go down to breakfast, but stayed in her bedroom on the sofa drinking a glass of milk into which an egg had been beaten, and listening to Hilton's criticisms of the German nation, delivered with much venom while she packed. But Hilton, though her contempt for German ways was so great as to be almost unutterable, was reconciled to a mistress who had so quickly given in to her wish to be taken back to Hill Street, and the venom was of an abstract nature, containing no personal sting of unfavourable comparisons with duchesses; so that

Susie was sipping her milk in a fairly placid frame of mind when there was a knock at the door, and Anna asked if she might come in.

"Oh yes, come in. Have you looked out the trains?"

"Yes. There's only one decent one, and you'll have to leave directly after luncheon. Won't you stay, Susie? You'll be so tired, going home without resting."

"Can't we leave before luncheon?"

"Yes, of course, if you prefer to lunch at Stralsund."

"Much. Have you ordered the shandrydan?"

"Yes, for half-past one."

"Then order it for half-past twelve. Hilton can drive with me."

"So I thought."

"Has that wretch been rubbing fish-oil on it again?"

"I don't think so, after what I said yesterday."

"I shouldn't think what you said yesterday could have frightened him much. You beamed at him as though he were your best friend."

"Did I?"

Anna was looking odd, Susie thought, and answering her remarks with a nervous, abstracted air. She had apparently been out, for her dress was muddy,

and she was quite rosy, and her hair was not so neat as usual. She stood about in an undecided sort of way, and glanced several times at Hilton on her knees before a trunk.

"Is that all the breakfast you are going to have?" she asked, becoming aware of the glass of milk.

"What other breakfast is there to have?" snapped Susie, who was hungry, and would have liked a great deal more.

"Well, the eggs and butter are very nice, anyway," said Anna, quite evidently thinking of other things.

"Now what has she got into her head?" Susie asked herself, watching her sister-in-law with misgiving. Anna's new moods were never by any chance of a sort to give Susie pleasure. Aloud she said tartly, "I can't eat eggs and butter by themselves. I shouldn't have had anything at all if it hadn't been for Hilton, who went into the kitchen and made me this herself."

"Excellent Hilton," said Anna, absently. "Haven't you done packing yet, Hilton?"

"No, m'm."

Anna sat down on the end of the sofa and began to twist the frills of Susie's dressing-gown round her fingers.

"I haven't closed my eyes all night," said Susie, putting on her martyr look, "nor has Hilton."

"Haven't you? Why not? I slept the sleep of the just—better, indeed, than any just that I ever heard of."

"What, didn't that man go into your room?"

"What man? Oh yes, Miss Leech was telling me about it. He lit the stoves, didn't he? I never heard a sound."

"You must have slept like a log then. Anyone in the least sensitive would have been frightened out of their senses. I was, and so was Hilton. I wouldn't spend another night in this house for anything you could give me."

It appeared that Susie really had just cause for complaint. She had been nervous the night before after Hilton had left her, unable to sleep, and scared by the thought of their defencelessness—six women alone in that wild place. She wished then with all her heart that Dellwig did live in the house. Rats scampering about in the attic above added to her terrors. The wind shook the windows of her room and howled disconsolately up and down. She bore it as long as she could, which was longer than most women would have borne it, and then knocked on the wall dividing her room from Hilton's. But Hilton, with the bedclothes over her head and all

the candles she had been able to collect alight, would not have stirred out of her room to save her mistress from dying; and Susie, desperate at the prospect of the awful hours round midnight, made one great effort of courage and sallied out to fetch her. Poor Susie, standing shivering before her maid's bolted door, scantily clothed, anxiously watching the flame of her candle that threatened each second to be blown out, alone on the wide, draughty landing, frightened at the sound of her own calls mingling weirdly with the creakings and bangings of the tempest-shaken house, was an object deserving of pity. It took some minutes to induce Hilton to open the door, and such minutes Susie had not, in the course of an ordered and normal existence, yet passed. They both went into Susie's room, locked themselves in, and Hilton lay down on the sofa; and after a long time they fell into an uneasy sleep. At half-past three Susie started up in bed; someone was trying to open the door and knocking. The candles had burnt themselves out, and she could not tell what time it was, but thought it must be early morning and that the servant wanted to bring her hot water; and she woke Hilton and bade her open the door. Hilton did so, gave a faint scream, and flung herself back on the sofa, where she lay as one dead, her face buried in the pillow. A man with a lantern and no shoes on was at the door, and came in noise-

lessly. Susie was never nearer fainting in her life. She sat in her bed, her cold hands clasped tightly round her knees, her eyes fixed on this dreadful apparition, unable to speak or move, paralysed by terror. This was the end, then, of all her hopes and ambitions—to come to Pomerania and die like a dog. Then the sickening feeling of fear gave way to one of overwhelming wrath when she found that all the man wanted was to light her stove. On the same principle that a child is shaken who has not after all been lost or run over, she was speechless with rage now that she found that she was not, after all, to be murdered. He was a very old man, and the light from the lantern cast strange reflections on his face and figure as he crouched before the stove. He mumbled as he worked, talking to the fire he was making as though it were a person. "*Du willst nicht brennen, Lump? Was? Na, warte mal!*" And when he had finished, crept out again without glancing at the occupants of the room, still mumbling.

"It's the custom of the country, I suppose," said Anna.

"Is it? Well the sooner we get out of such a country the better. You are determined to stay in spite of everything? I can tell you I don't at all like my child being here, but you force me to leave

her because you know very well that I can't let you stay here alone."

Anna glanced at Hilton, folding a dress with immense deliberation.

"Oh, Hilton knows what I think," said Susie, with a shrug.

"But she doesn't know what *I* think," said Anna. "I must talk to you before you leave, so please let her finish packing afterwards. Go and have your breakfast, Hilton."

"Did you say breakfast, m'm?" inquired Hilton with an innocent look.

"Breakfast?" repeated Susie; "Poor thing, I'd like to know how and where she is to get any."

"Well, then, go and don't have your breakfast," said Anna impatiently. She had something to tell Susie that must be told soon, and was not in a mood to bear with Hilton's ways.

"How hospitable," remarked Susie as the door closed. "Really you are a delightful hostess."

Anna laughed. "I don't mean to be brutal," she said, "but if we can exist on the food without looking tragic I suppose she can too, especially as it is only for one day."

"My one consolation in leaving Letty here is that she will be dieted in spite of herself. I expect you to bring her back quite thin."

Anna got up restlessly and went to the window.

"And whatever you do, don't forget that the return tickets only last till the 24th. But you'll be sick of it long before then."

Anna turned round and leaned her back against the window. The strong morning light was on her hair, and her face was in shadow, yet Susie had a feeling that she was looking guilty.

"Susie, I've been thinking," she said with an effort.

"Really? How nice."

"Yes, it was, for I found out what it is that I must do if I mean to be happy. But I'm afraid that *you* won't think it nice, and will scold me. Now don't scold me.

"Well, tell me what it is." Susie lay staring at Anna's form against the light, bracing herself to hear something disagreeable. She knew very well from past experience that Anna's new plan, whatever it was, was certain to be wild and foolish.

"I am going to stay here."

"I know you are, and I know that nothing I can say will make you change your mind. Peter is just like you—the more I show him what a fool he's going to make of himself the more he insists on doing it. He calls it determination. Average people like myself, with smaller and more easily managed brains than you two wonders have got, call it pigheadedness."

"I don't mean only for Letty's holidays; I mean for good."

"For good?" Susie opened her mouth and stared in much the same blank consternation that Dellwig had shown on hearing that she did not like eating pig.

"Don't be angry with me," said Anna, coming over to the sofa and sitting on the floor by Susie's side; and she caught hold of her hand and began to talk fast and eagerly. "I always intended spending this money in helping poor people, but didn't quite know in what way—now I see my way clearly, and I must, *must* go it. Don't you remember in the catechism there's the duty towards God and the duty towards one's neighbour——"

"Oh, if you're going to talk religion——" said Susie, pulling away her hand in great disgust.

"No, no, do listen," said Anna, catching it again and stroking it while she talked, to Susie's intense irritation, who hated being stroked.

"If you are going into the catechism," she said, "Hilton had better come in again. It might do her good."

"No, no—I only wanted to say that there's another duty not in the catechism, greater than the duty towards one's neighbour——"

"My dear Anna, it isn't likely that you can improve on the catechism. And fancy wanting to, at

breakfast-time. Don't stroke my hand—it gives me the fidgets.”

“But I want to explain things—do listen. The duty the catechism leaves out is the duty towards oneself. You can't get away from your duties, you know, Susie——” And she knit her brows in her effort to follow out her thought.

“My goodness, as though I ever tried! If ever a poor woman did her duty, I'm that woman.”

“—and I believe that if I do those two duties, towards my neighbour and myself, I shall be doing my duty towards God.”

Susie gave her body an impatient twist. She thought it positively indecent to speak of sacred things so early in the morning in cold blood. “What has this drivel to do with your stopping here?” she asked angrily.

“It has everything to do with it—my duty towards myself is to be as happy and as good as possible, and my duty towards my neighbour——”

“Oh, bother your neighbour and your duty!” cried Susie in exasperation.

“—is to help him to be good and happy too.”

“Him? Her, I hope. Don't forget decency, my dear. A girl has no duties whatever towards male neighbours.”

“Well, I do mean her,” said Anna, looking up and laughing.

"So you think that by living here you'll make yourself happy?"

"Yes, I do—I do think so. Perhaps I am wrong, and shall find out I'm wrong, but I must try."

"You'll leave all your friends and relations and stay in this God-forsaken place where you can't even live like a lady?"

"Uncle Joachim said it was my one chance of leading the better life."

"Unutterable old fool," said Susie with bitterest contempt. "That money, then, is going to be thrown away on Germans? As though there weren't poor people enough in England, if your ambition is to pose as a benefactress!"

"Oh, I don't want to pose as anything—I only want to help unhappy wretches," cried Anna, laying her cheek caressingly on Susie's unwilling hand. "Now, don't scold me—forgive me if I'm silly, and be patient with me till I find out that I've made a goose of myself and come creeping back to you and Peter. But I *must* do it—I *must* try—I *will* do what I think is right."

"And who are the wretches, pray, who are to be made happy?"

"Oh, those I am sorriest for—that no one else helps—the genteel ones, if I can only get at them."

"I never heard of genteel wretches," said Susie.

Anna laughed again. "I was thinking it all out in the forest this morning," she said, "and it suddenly flashed across me that this big, roomy house was never meant not to be used, and that instead of going to see poor people, and giving them money in the ordinary way, it would be so much better to let women of the better classes, who have no money, and who are dependent and miserable, come and live with me and share mine, and have everything that I have—exactly the same, with no difference of any sort. There is room for twelve at least, and wouldn't it be beautiful to make twelve people, who had lost all hope and all courage, happy for the rest of their days?"

"Oh, the girl's mad!" cried Susie, springing up from the sofa, no longer able to bear herself. She began to walk about the room, not knowing what to say or do, absolutely without sympathy for beneficent impulses, at all times possessed of a fine scorn for ideals, feeling that no argument would be of any avail with an Estcourt whose mind was made up, shocked that good money, so hard to get, and so very precious when got, should be thrown away in such a manner, bewildered by the difficulties of the situation, for how could a girl of Anna's age live alone, and direct a house full of objects of charity? Would the objects themselves be a sufficient chaperonage? Would her friends at home think so? Would

they not blame her, Susie, for having allowed all this? As though she could prevent it! Or would they expect her to stay with Anna in this place till she should marry? As though anybody would ever marry such a lunatic! "Mad, mad, mad!" cried Susie, wringing her hands.

"I was afraid that you wouldn't like it," said the culprit on the floor, watching her with a distressed face.

"Like it? Oh—mad, mad!" And she continued to walk and wring her hands.

"Well, you'll stay, then," she said, suddenly stopping in front of Anna, "I know you well enough, and shall waste no breath arguing. That infatuated old man's money has turned your head—I didn't know it was so weak. But look into your heart when I am gone—you'll have time enough and quiet enough—and ask yourself honestly whether what you are going to do is a proper way of paying back all I have done for you, and all the expense you have been. You know what my wishes are about you, and you don't care one jot. Gratitude! There isn't a spark of it in your whole body. Never was there a more selfish creature, and I can't believe that ingratitude and selfishness are the stuff that makes saints. Don't dare to talk any more rot about duty to your neighbour to me. An English-

woman to come and spend her money on German charities——”

“It’s German money,” murmured Anna.

“And to *live* here—to live *here*—oh, mad, mad!” And Susie’s indignation threatening to choke her, she resumed her walk and her gesticulations, her high heels tapping furiously on the bare boards.

She longed to take Letty and Miss Leech away with her that very morning, and punish Anna by leaving her entirely alone; but she did not dare because of Peter. Peter was always on Anna’s side when there were differences, and would be sure to do something dreadful when he heard of it—perhaps come and live here too, and never go back to his wife any more. Oh, these half Germans! Why had she married into a family with such a taint in its blood? “You will have to have someone here,” she said, turning on Anna, who still sat on the floor by the sofa, a look on her face of apology and penitence mixed with firmness that Susie well knew. “How can you stay here alone? I shall leave Miss Leech with you till the end of the holidays, though I hate to seem to encourage you, but then you see I do my duty and always have, though I don’t talk about it. When I get home I shall look for some elderly woman who won’t mind coming here and seeing that you don’t make yourself too much of a by-word,

and the day she comes you are to send me back my child."

"It is good of you to let me keep Letty, dear Susie——"

"Dear Susie!"

"But I don't mean to be a by-word, as you call it," continued Anna, the ghost of a smile lurking in her eyes, "and I don't want an Englishwoman. What use would she be here? She wouldn't understand if it was a German by-word that I turned into. I thought of asking the parson how I had better set about getting a German lady—a grave and sober female, advanced in years, as Uncle Joachim wrote."

"Oh, Uncle Joachim——" Susie could hardly endure to hear the name. It was that odious old man who had filled Anna's head with these ideas. To leave her money was admirable, but to influence a weak girl's mind with his wishy-washy German philosophy about the better life and such rubbish, as he evidently had done during those excursions with her, was conduct so shameful that she found no words strong enough to express her opinion of it. Everyone would blame her for what had happened, everyone would jeer at her, and say that the moment an opportunity of escape had presented itself Anna had seized it, preferring an existence of loneliness and hardship—any sort of existence—to all the

pleasures of civilised life in Susie's company. Peter would certainly be very angry with her, and reproach her with not having made Anna happy enough. Happy enough! The girl had cost her at least three hundred a year, what with her expensive education and all her clothes since she came out; and if three hundred good pounds spent on a girl could not make her happy she'd like to know what could. And no one—not one of those odious people in London whom she secretly hated—would have a single word of censure for Anna. No one ever had. All her vagaries and absurdities during the last few years when she had been so provoking had been smiled at—had been, Susie knew, put down to her treatment of her. Treatment of her, indeed! The thought of these things made Susie writhe. She had been looking forward to the next season, to having her pretty sister-in-law with her in the happy mood she had been in since she heard of her good fortune, and had foreseen nothing but advantages to herself from Anna's presence in her house—an Anna spending and not being spent upon, and no doubt to be persuaded to share the expenses of housekeeping. And now she must go home by herself to blame, scoldings, and derision. The prospect was almost more than she could bear. She went to the door, opened it, and turning to Anna fired a parting shot. "Let no one," she said, her voice shaken by deepest

disgust, "who wants to be happy ever spend a penny on her husband's relations."

And then she called Hilton; nor did she leave off calling till Hilton appeared, and so prevented Anna from saying another word.

CHAPTER VIII.

BUT if Susie's rage was such that she refused to say good-bye, and terrified Miss Leech while she was waiting in the hall for the carriage by dark allusions to strait-waistcoats, when the parson was taken into Anna's confidence after dinner on the following night his raptures knew no bounds. "*Liebes, edel-denkendes Fräulein!*" he burst out, clasping his hands and gazing with a moist, ecstatic eye at this young sprig of piety. He was a good man, not very learned, not very refined, sentimental exceedingly, and much inclined to become tearfully eloquent on such subjects as *die lieben kleinen Kinder*, *die herrliche Natur*, *die Frau als Schutzengel*, and the sacredness of *das Familienleben*.

Anna felt that he was the only person at hand who could perhaps help her to find twelve dejected ladies willing to be made happy, and had unfolded her plan to him as tersely as possible in her stumbling German, with none of those accompanying digressions into the question of feelings that Susie stigmatised as drivel; and she sat uncomfortable

enough while he burst forth into praises that would not end of her goodness and nobleness. It is hard to look anything but fatuous when somebody is extolling your virtues to your face, and she could not help both looking and feeling foolish during his extravagant glorification. She did not doubt his sincerity, and indeed he was absolutely sincere, but she wished that he would be less flowery and less long, and would skip the raptures and get on to the main subject, which was practical advice.

She wore the simple white dress that had caused such a sensation in the neighbourhood, a garment that hung in long, soft folds, accentuating her slender length of limb. Her bright hair was parted and tucked behind her ears. Everything about her breathed an absolute want of self-consciousness and vanity, a perfect freedom from the least thought of the impression she might be making; yet she was beautiful, and the good man, observing her beauty, and supposing from what she had just told him an equal beauty of character, for ever afterwards when he thought of angels on quiet Sunday evenings in his garden, clothed them as Anna was clothed that night, not even shrinking from the pretty, bare shoulders and scantily-sleeved arms, but facing them with a courage worthy of a man, however doubtfully it might become a pastor.

His wife, in her best dress, which was also her

tightest, sat on the edge of a chair some way off, marvelling greatly at many things. She could not hear what it was Anna had said to set her husband off exclaiming, because the governess persisted in trying to talk German to her, and would not be satisfied with vague replies. She was disappointed by the sudden disappearance of the sister-in-law—gone before she had shown herself to a single soul; astonished that she had not been requested to sit on the sofa, in which place of honour the young Fräulein sprawled in a way that would certainly ruin her clothes; disgusted that she had not been pressed at table—nay, not even asked—to partake of every dish a second time; indeed, no one had seemed to notice or care whether she ate anything at all. These were strange ways. And where were the Dellwigs, those great people, accustomed to patronise her because she was the parson's wife? Was it possible that they had not been invited? Were there then quarrels already? She could not of course dream that Anna would never have thought of asking her inspector and his wife to dinner, and that in her ignorance she regarded the parson as a person on an altogether higher social level than the inspector. These things, joined to conjectures as to the probable price by the yard of Anna's, Letty's, and Miss Leech's clothes, gave Frau Manske more food for reflection than she had had for years; and she sat turning them over

slowly in her mind in the intervals between Miss Leech's sentences, while her dress, which was of silk, creaked ominously with every painful breath she drew.

"The best way to act," said the parson, when he had exhausted the greater part of his raptures, "will be to advertise in a newspaper of a Christian character."

"But not in my name," said Anna.

"No, no, we must be discreet—we must be very discreet. The advertisement must be drawn up with skill. I will make, simultaneously, inquiries among my colleagues in the holy office, but there must also be an advertisement. What would the gracious Miss's opinion be of the desirability of referring all applicants, in the first instance, to me?"

"Why, I think it would be an excellent plan, if you do not mind the trouble."

"Trouble! Joy fills me at the thought of taking part in this good work. Little did I think that our poor corner of the fatherland was to become a holy place, a blessed refuge for the world-worn, a nook fragrant with charity——"

"No, not charity," interposed Anna.

"Whose perfume," continued the parson, determined to finish his sentence,—“whose perfume will ascend day and night to the attentive heavens. But

such are the celestial surprises Providence keeps in reserve and springs upon us when we least expect it."

"Yes," said Anna. "But what shall we put in the advertisement?"

"*Ach ja*, the advertisement. In the contemplation of this beautiful scheme I forget the advertisement." And again the moisture of ecstasy suffused his eyes, and again he clasped his hands and gazed at her with his head on one side, almost as though the young lady herself were the beautiful scheme.

Anna got up and went to the writing-table to fetch a pencil and a sheet of paper, anxious to keep him to the point; and the parson, watching the graceful white figure, was more than ever struck by her resemblance to his idea of angels. He did not consider how easy it was to look like a being from another world, a creature purified of every earthly grossness, to eyes accustomed to behold the redundant exuberance of his own excellent wife.

She brought the paper, and sat down again at the table on which the lamp stood. "How does one write any sort of advertisement in German?" she said. "I could not write one for a housemaid. And this one must be done so carefully."

"Very true; for, alas, even ladies are sometimes not all that they profess to be. Sad that in a Christian country there should be impostors. Doubly sad that there should be any of the female sex."

"Very sad, said Anna, smiling. "You must tell me which are the impostors among those that answer."

"*Ach*, it will not be easy," said the parson, whose experience of ladies was limited, and who began to see that he was taking upon himself responsibilities that threatened to become grave. Suppose he recommended an applicant who afterwards departed with the gracious Miss's spoons in her bag? "*Ach*, it will not be easy," he said, shaking his head.

"Oh, well," said Anna, "we must risk the impostors. There may not be any at all. How would you begin?"

The parson threw himself back in his chair, folded his hands, cast up his eyes to the ceiling, and meditated. Anna waited, pencil in hand, ready to write at his dictation. Frau Manske at the other end of the room was straining her ears to hear what was going on, but Miss Leech, desirous both of entertaining her and of practising her German, would not cease from her spasmodic talk, even expecting her mistakes to be corrected. And there were no refreshments, no glasses of cooling beer being handed round, no liquid consolation of any sort, not even seltzer water. She regarded her evening as a failure.

"A Christian lady of noble sentiments," dictated the parson, apparently reading the words off the ceiling, "offers a home in her house——"

"Is this the advertisement?" asked Anna.

"—offers a home in her house——"

"I don't quite like the beginning," hesitated Anna. "I would rather leave out about the noble sentiments."

"As the gracious one pleases. Modesty can never be anything but an ornament. 'A Christian lady——'"

"But why a *Christian* lady? Why not simply a lady? Are there, then, heathen ladies about, that you insist on the Christian?"

"Worse, worse than heathen," replied the parson, sitting up straight, and fixing eyeballs suddenly grown fiery on her; and his voice fell to a hissing whisper, in strange contrast to his previous honeyed tones. "The heathen live in far-off lands, where they keep quiet till our missionaries gather them into the Church's fold—but here, here in our midst, here everywhere, taking the money from our pockets, nay, the very bread from our mouths, are the *Jews*."

Impossible to describe the tone of fear and hatred with which this word was pronounced.

Anna gazed at him, mystified. "The Jews?" she echoed. One of her greatest friends at home was a Jew, a delightful person, the mere recollection of whom made her smile, so witty and charming and

kind was he. And of Jews in general she could not remember to have heard anything at all.

"But not only money from our pockets and bread from our mouths," continued the parson leaning forward, his light grey eyes opened to their widest extent, and speaking in a whisper that made her flesh begin the process known as creeping, "but blood—blood from our veins."

"Blood from your veins?" she repeated faintly. It sounded horrid. It offended her ears. It had nothing to do with the advertisement. The strange light in his eyes made her think of fanaticism, cruelty, and the Middle Ages. The mildest of men in general, as she found later on, rabidness seized him at the mere mention of Jews.

"Blood," he hissed, "from the veins of Christians, for the performance of their unholy rites. Did the gracious one never hear of ritual murders?"

"No," said Anna, shrinking back the nearer he leaned towards her, "never in my life. Don't tell me now, for it—it sounds interesting. I should like to hear about it all another time. 'A Christian lady offers her home,'" she went on quickly, scribbling that much down, and then looking at him inquiringly.

"*Ach ja*," he said in his natural voice, leaning back in his chair and reducing his eyes to their normal size, "I forget again the advertisement. 'A

Christian lady offers her home to others of her sex and station who are without means——’ ”

“And without friends, and without hope,” added Anna, writing.

“*Gut, gut, sehr gut.*”

“She has room in her house in the country,” Anna went on, writing as she spoke, “for twelve such ladies, and will be glad to share with them all that she possesses of fortune and happiness.”

“*Gut, gut, sehr gut.*”

“Is the German correct?”

“Quite correct. I would add ‘Strictest inquiries will be made before acceptance of any application by Herr Pastor Manske of Lohm, to whom all letters are to be addressed. Applicants must be ladies of good family, who have fallen on evil days by the will of God.’ ”

Anna wrote this down as far as days, after which she put a full stop.

“It pleases me not entirely,” said Manske, musing; “the language is not sufficiently noble. Noble schemes should be alluded to in noble words.”

“But not in an advertisement.”

“Why not? We ought not to hide our good thoughts from our fellows, but rather open our hearts, pour out our feelings, spend freely all that we have in us of virtue and piety, for the edification and exhilaration of others.”

"But not in an advertisement. I don't want to exhilarate the public."

"And why not exhilarate the public, dear Miss? Is it not composed of units of like passions to ourselves? Units on the way to heaven, units bowed down by the same sorrows, cheered by the same hopes, torn asunder by the same temptations, as the gracious one and myself?" And immediately he launched forth into a flood of eloquence about units; for in Germany sermons are all extempore, and the clergy, from constant practice, acquire a fatal fluency of speech, bursting out in the week on the least provocation into preaching, and not by any known means to be stopped.

"Oh—words, words, words!" thought Anna, waiting till he should have finished. His wife, hearing the well-known rapid speech of his inspired moments, glowed with pride. "My Adolf surpasses himself," she thought; "the Miss must wonder."

The Miss did wonder. She sat and wondered, her elbows on the arms of the chair, her finger-tips joined together, and her eyes fixed on her finger-tips. She did not like to look at him, because, knowing how different was the effect produced on her to that which he of course imagined, she was sorry for him.

"It is so good of you to help me," she said with gentle irrelevance when the longed-for pause at length

came. "There was something else that I wanted to consult you about. I must look for a companion—an elderly German lady, who will help me in the housekeeping."

"Yes, yes, I comprehend. But would not the twelve be sufficient companions, and helps in the housekeeping?"

"No, because I would not like them to think that I want anything done for me in return for their home. I want them to do exactly what makes them happiest. They will all have had sad lives, and must waste no more time in doing things they don't quite like."

"Ah—noble, noble," murmured the parson, quite as unpractical as Anna, and fascinated by the very vagueness of her plan of benevolence.

"The companion I wish to find would be another sort of person, and would help me in return for a salary."

"Certainly—I comprehend."

"I thought perhaps you would tell me how to advertise for such a person?"

"Surely, surely. My wife has a sister——"

He paused. Anna looked up quickly. She had not reckoned with the possibility of his wife's having sisters.

"*Lieber Schatz*," he called to his wife, "what does thy sister Helena do now?"

Frau Manske got up and came over to them with the alacrity of relief. "What dost thou say, dear Adolf?" she asked, laying her hand on his shoulder. He took it in his, stroked it, kissed it, and finally put his arm round her waist and held it there while he talked; all to the exceeding joy of Letty, to whom such proceedings had the charm of absolute freshness.

"Thy sister Helena—is she at present in the parental house?" he asked, looking up at her fondly, warmed into an affection even greater than ordinary by the circumstance of having spectators.

Frau Manske was not sure. She would write and inquire. Anna proposed that she should sit down, but the parson playfully held her closer. "This is my guardian angel," he explained, smiling beatifically at her, "the faithful mother of my children, now grown up and gone their several ways. Does the gracious Miss remember the immortal lines of Schiller '*Ehret die Frauen, sie flechten und weben himmlische Rosen in's irdische Leben?*' Such has been the occupation of this dear wife, only interrupted by her occasional visits to bathing-resorts, since the day, more than twenty-five years ago, when she consented to tread with me the path leading heavenwards. Not a day has there been, except when she was at the seaside, without its roses."

"Oh," said Anna. She felt that the remark was

not at the height of the situation, and added, "How—how interesting." This also struck her as inadequate; but all further inspiration failing her, she was reduced to the silent sympathy of smiles.

"Ten children did the Lord bless us with," continued the parson, expanding into confidences, "and six it was His will again to remove."

"The drains——" murmured Frau Manske.

"Yes, truly the drains in the town where we lived then were bad, very bad. But one must not question the wisdom of Providence."

"No, but one might mend——" Anna stopped, feeling that under some circumstances even the mending of drains might be impious. She had heard so much about piety and Providence within the last two hours that she was confused, and was no longer clear as to the exact limit of conduct beyond which a flying in the face of Providence might be said to begin.

But the parson, clasping his wife to his side, paid no heed to anything she might be saying, for he was already well on in a detailed account of the personal appearance, habits, and career of his four remaining children, and dwelt so fondly on each in turn that he forgot Sister Helena and the second advertisement; and when he had explained all their numerous excellences and harmless idiosyncrasies, including their preferences in matters of food and drink, he abruptly

quitted this topic, and proceeded to expound Anna's scheme to his wife, who had listened with ill-concealed impatience to the first part of his discourse, consumed as she was with curiosity to hear what it was that Anna had confided to him.

So Anna had to listen to the raptures all over again. The eager interest of the wife disturbed her. She doubted whether Frau Manske had any real sympathy with her plan. Her inquisitiveness was unquestionable; but Anna felt that opening her heart to the parson and opening it to his wife were two different things. Though he was wordy, he was certainly enthusiastic; his wife, on the other hand, appeared to be chiefly interested in the question of cost. "The cost will be colossal," she said, surveying Anna from head to foot. "But the gracious Miss is rich," she added.

Anna began to examine her finger-tips again.

On the way home through the dark fields, after having criticised each dish of the dinner and expressed the opinion that the entertainment was not worthy of such a wealthy lady, Frau Manske observed to her husband that it was true, then, what she had always heard of the English, that they were peculiarly liable to prolonged attacks of craziness.

"Craziness! Thou callest this craziness? Is it my wife, the wife of a pastor, that I hear applying such a word to so beautiful, so Christian, a scheme?"

“But the good money—to give it all away. Yes, **it** is very Christian, but it is also crazy.”

“Woman, shut thy mouth!” cried the parson, **b**eside himself with indignation at hearing such **senti-**
ments from such lips.

Clearly Frau Manske was not at that moment **e**ngaged with her roses.

CHAPTER IX.

THE next morning early, Anna went over to the farm to ask Dellwig to lend her any newspapers he might have. She was anxious to advertise as soon as possible for a companion, and now that she knew of the existence of Sister Helena thought it better to write this advertisement without the parson's aid, copying any other one of the sort that she might see in the papers. Until she had secured the services of a German lady who would tell her how to set about the reforms she intended making in her house, she was perfectly helpless. She wanted to put her home in order quickly, so that the twelve unhappy ones should not be kept waiting; and there were many things to be done. Servants, furniture, everything, was necessary, and she did not know where such things were to be had. She did not even know where washerwomen were obtainable, and Frau Dellwig never seemed to be at home when she sent for her, or went to her seeking information. On Good Friday, after Susie's departure, she had sent a message to the farm desiring the attendance of the in-

spector's wife, whom she wished to consult about the dinner to be prepared for the Manskes, all provisions apparently passing through Frau Dellwig's hands; and she had been told that the lady was at church. On Saturday morning, disturbed by the emptiness of her larder and the imminence of her guests, she had gone herself to the farm, but was told that the lady was in the cow-sheds—in which cow-shed nobody exactly knew. Anna had been forced to ask Dellwig about the food. On Sunday she took Letty with her, abashed by the whisperings and starings she had had to endure when she went alone. Nor on this occasion did she see the inspector's wife, and she began to wonder what had become of her.

The Dellwigs' wrath and amazement when they found that the parson and his wife had been invited to dinner and they themselves left out was indescribable. Never had such an insult been offered them. They had always been the first people of their class in the place, always held their heads up and condescended to the clergy, always been helped first at table, gone first through doors, sat in the right-hand corners of sofas. If he was furious, she was still more so, filled with venom and hatred unutterable for the innocent, but it must be added overjoyed, Frau Manske; and though her own interest demanded it, she was altogether unable to bring herself to meet Anna for the purpose, as she knew, of being con-

sulted about the menu to be offered to the wretched upstart. Indeed, Frau Dellwig's position was similar to that painful one in which Susie found herself when her influential London acquaintance left her out of the invitations to the wedding; on which occasion, as we know, Susie had been constrained to flee to Germany in order to escape the comments of her friends. Frau Dellwig could not flee anywhere. She was obliged to stay where she was and bear it as best she might, humiliated in the eyes of the whole neighbourhood—an object of derision to her very milkmaids. Philosophers smile at such trials; but to persons who are not philosophers—and at Kleinwalde these were in the majority—they are more difficult to endure than any family bereavement. There is no dignity about them, and friends, instead of sympathising, rejoice more or less openly according to the degree of their civilisation. The degree of civilisation among Frau Dellwig's friends was not great, and the rejoicings on the next Sunday when they all met would be but ill-concealed; there was no escape from them, they had to be faced, and the malicious condolences accepted with what countenance she could. Instead of making sausages, therefore, she shut herself in her bedroom and wept.

And so it came about that the unconscious Anna, whose one desire was to live at peace with her neigh-

bours, made two enemies within two days. "All women," said Dellwig to his wife, "high and low, are alike. Unless they have a husband to keep them in their right places, they become religious and run after pastors. Manske has wormed himself in very cleverly—truly very cleverly. But we will worm him out again with equal cleverness. As for his wife, what canst thou expect from so great a fool?"

"No, indeed, from her I expect nothing," replied his wife, tossing her head, "but from the niece of our late master I expected the behaviour of a lady." And at that moment, the niece of her late master being announced, she fled into her bedroom.

Anna, friendly as ever, specially kind to Dellwig since his tears on the night of her arrival, came with Letty into the gloomy little office where he was working, with all the morning sunshine in her face. Though she was perplexed by many things she was intensely happy. The perfect freedom, after her years of servitude, was like heaven. Here she was in her own home, from which nobody could take her, free to arrange her life as she chose. Oh, it was a beautiful world, and this the most beautiful corner of it! She was sure the sky was bluer at Kleinwalde than in other places, and that the larks sang louder. And then was she not on the very verge of realising

her dreams of bringing the light of happiness into dark and hopeless lives? Oh, the beautiful, beautiful world! She came into Dellwig's room with the love of it shining in her eyes.

He was as obsequious as ever, for unfortunately his bread and butter depended on this perverse young woman; but he was also graver and less talkative, considering within himself that he could not be expected to pass over such a slight without some alteration in his manner. He ought, he felt, to show that he was pained, and he ought to show it so unmistakably that she would perhaps be led to offer some explanation of her conduct. Accordingly he assumed the subdued behaviour of one whose feelings have been hurt, and Anna thought how greatly he improved on acquaintance.

He would have given much to know why she wanted the papers, for surely it was unusual for women to read newspapers? When there was a murder, or anything of that sort, his wife liked to see them, but not at other times. "Is the gracious Miss interested in politics?" he inquired, as he put several together.

"No, not particularly," said Anna; "at least, not yet in German politics. I must live here a little while first."

"In—in literature, perhaps?"

"No, not particularly. I know so little about German books."

"There are some well-written articles occasionally on the modes in ladies' dresses."

"Really?"

"My wife tells me she often gets hints from them as to what is being worn. Ladies, we know," he added with a superior smile—checked, however, on his remembering that he was pained—"are interested in these matters."

"Yes, they are," agreed Anna, smiling, and holding out her hand for the papers.

"Ah, then, it is that that the gracious Miss wishes to read?" he said quickly.

"No, not particularly," said Anna, who began to see that he too suffered from the prevailing inquisitiveness. Besides, she was too much afraid of his having sisters, or of his wife's having sisters, eager to come and be a blessing to her, to tell him about her advertisement.

On the steps of his house, to which Dellwig accompanied the two girls, stood a man who had just got off his horse. He was pulling off his gloves as he watched it being led away by a boy. He had his back to Anna, and she looked at it interested, for it was unlike any back she had yet seen in Kleinwalde, in that it was the back of a gentleman.

"It is Herr von Lohm," said Dellwig, "who has

business here this morning. Some of our people unfortunately drink too much on holidays like Good Friday, and there are quarrels. I explained to the gracious one that he is our *Amtsvorsteher*."

Herr von Lohm turned at the sound of Dellwig's voice, and took off his hat. "Pray present me to these ladies," he said to Dellwig, and bowed as gravely to Letty as to Anna, to her great satisfaction.

"So this is my neighbour?" thought Anna, looking down at him from the higher step on which she stood with her papers under her arm.

"So this is old Joachim's niece, of whom he was always talking?" thought Lohm, looking up at her. "Wise old man to leave the place to her instead of to those unpleasant sons." And he proceeded to make a few conventional remarks, hoping that she liked her new home and would soon be quite used to the country life. "It is very quiet and lonely for a lady not used to our kind of country, with its big estates and few neighbours," he said in English. "May I talk English to you? It gives me pleasure to do so."

"Please do," said Anna. Here was a person who might be very helpful to her if ever she reached her wits' end; and how nice he looked, how clean, and what a pleasant voice he had, falling so gratefully on ears already aching with Dellwig's shouts and the parson's emphatic oratory.

He was somewhere between thirty and forty, not young at all, she thought, having herself never got out of the habit of feeling very young; and beyond being long and wiry, with not even a tendency to fat, as she noticed with pleasure, there was nothing striking about him. His top-boots and his green Norfolk jacket and green felt hat, with a little feather stuck in it, gave him an air of being a sportsman. It was refreshing to come across him, if only because he did not bow. Also, considering him from the top of the steps, she became suddenly conscious that Dellwig and the parson neglected their persons more than was seemly. They were both no doubt very excellent; but she did like nicely washed men.

Herr von Lohm began to talk about Uncle Joachim, with whom he had been very intimate. Anna came down the steps, and he went a few yards with her, leaving Dellwig standing at the door, and followed by the eyes of Dellwig's wife, concealed behind her bedroom curtain.

"I shall be with you in one moment," called Lohm over his shoulder.

"*Gut*," said Dellwig; and he went in to tell his wife that these English ladies were very free with gentlemen, and to bid her mark his words that Lohm and Kleinwalde would before long be one estate.

"And us? What will become of us?" she asked, eyeing him anxiously.

"I too would like to know that," replied her husband. "This all comes of leaving land away from the natural heirs." And with great energy he proceeded to curse the memory of his late master.

Lohm's English was so good that it astonished Anna. It was stiff and slow, but he made no mistakes at all. His manner was grave, and looking at him more attentively she saw traces on his face of much hard work and anxiety. He told her that his mother had been a cousin of Uncle Joachim's wife. "So that there is a slight relationship by marriage existing between us," he said.

"Very slight," said Anna, smiling,— "faint almost beyond recognition."

"Does your niece stay with you for an indefinite period?" he asked. "I cannot avoid knowing that this young lady is your niece," he added with a smile, "and that she is here with her governess, and that Lady Estcourt left suddenly on Good Friday, because all that concerns you is of the greatest interest to the inhabitants of this quiet place, and they talk of little else."

"How long will it take them to get used to me? I don't like being an object of interest. No, Letty is going home as soon as I have found a companion. That is why I am taking the inspector's newspapers

home with me. I can't construct an advertisement out of my store of German, and am going to see if I can find something that will serve as model."

"Oh, may I help you? What difficulties you must meet with every hour of the day."

"I do," agreed Anna, thinking of all there was to be done before she could open her doors and her arms to the twelve.

"Any service that I can render to my oldest friend's niece will give me the greatest pleasure. Will you allow me to send the advertisement for you? You can hardly know how or where to send it."

"I don't," said Anna. "It would be very kind—I really would be grateful. It is so important that I should find somebody soon."

"It is of the first importance," said Lohm.

"Has the parson told him of my plans already?" thought Anna. But Lohm had not seen Manske that morning, and was only picturing this little thing to himself, this dainty little lady, used to such a different life, alone in the empty house, struggling with her small supply of German to make the two raw servants understand her ways. Anna was not a little thing at all, and she would have been half-amused and half-indignant if she had known that that was the impression she had made on him.

"My sister, Gräfin Hasdorf," he began—"Heavens,"

she thought, "has *he* got an unattached sister?"—"sometimes stays with me with her children, and when she is here will be able to help you in many ways if you will allow her to. She too knew your uncle from her childhood. She will be greatly interested to know that you have had the courage to settle here."

"Courage?" echoed Anna. "Why, I love it. It's the most beautiful place in the world."

Lohm looked doubtfully at her for a moment; but there was no mistaking the sincerity of those eyes. "It is pleasant to hear you say so," he said. "My sister Trudi would scarcely credit her ears if she were present. To her it is a terrible place, and she pities me with all her heart because my lot is cast in it."

Anna laughed. She thought she knew very well what sister Trudis were like. "I do not pity you," she said; "I couldn't pity any being who lived in this air, and under this sky. Look how blue it is—and the geese—did you ever see such white geese?"

A flock of geese were being driven across the sunny yard, dazzling in their whiteness. Anna lifted up her face to the sun and drew in a long breath of the sharp air. She forgot Lohm for a moment—it was such a glorious Easter Sunday, and the world so full of the abundant gifts of God.

Dellwig, who had been watching them from his wife's window, thought that the brawlers who were going to be fined had been kept waiting long enough, and came out again onto the steps.

Lohm saw him, and felt that he must go. "I must do my business," he said, "but as you have given me permission I will send an advertisement to the papers to-night. Of course you desire to have an elderly lady of good family?"

"Yes, but not too elderly—not so elderly that she won't be able to work. There will be so much to do—so very much to do."

Lohm went away wondering what work there could possibly be, except the agreeable and easy work of seeing that this young lady was properly fed, and properly petted, and in every way taken care of.

CHAPTER X.

He sent the advertisement by the evening post to two or three of the best newspapers. He had seen the pastor after morning church, who had at once poured into his ears all about Anna's twelve ladies, garnishing the story with interjections warmly appreciative of the action of Providence in the matter. Lohm had been considerably astonished, but had said little; it was not his way to say much at any time to the parson, and the ecstasies about the new neighbour jarred on him. Miss Estcourt's need of advice must have been desperate for her to have confided in Manske. He appreciated his good qualities, but his family had never been intimate with the parson; perhaps because from time immemorial the Lohms had been chiefly males, and the attitude of male Germans towards parsons is, at its best, one of indulgence. This Lohm restricted his dealings with him, as his father had done before him, to the necessary deliberations on the treatment of the sick and poor, and to official meetings in the schoolhouse. He was invariably kind to him, and lent as willing an

ear as his slender purse allowed to applications for assistance; but the idea of discussing spiritual experiences with him, or, in times of personal sorrow, of dwelling conversationally on his griefs, would never have occurred to him. The easy familiarity with which Manske spoke of the Deity offended his taste. These things, these sacred and awful mysteries, were the secrets between the soul and its God. No man, thought Lohm, should dare to touch with profane questioning the veil shrouding his neighbour's inner life. Manske, however, knew no fear and no compunction. He would ask the most tremendous questions between two mouthfuls of pudding, backing himself up with the whole authority of the Lutheran Church, besides the Scriptures; and if the poor people and the partly educated liked it, and were edified, and enjoyed stirring up and talking over their religious emotions almost as much as they did the latest village scandal, Lohm, who had no taste either for scandal or emotions, kept the parson at arm's length.

He thought a good deal about what Manske had told him during the afternoon. She had gone to the parson, then, for help, because there was no one else to go to. Poor little thing. He could imagine the sort of speeches Manske had made her, and the sort of advertisement he would have told her to write. Poor little thing. Well, what he could do was to

put her in the way of getting a companion as quickly as possible, and a very sensible, capable woman it ought to be. No wonder she was not to be past hard work. Work there would certainly be, with twelve women in the house undergoing the process of being made happy. Lohm could not help smiling at the plan. He thought of Miss Estcourt courageously trying to demolish the crust of dejection that had formed in the course of years over the hearts of her patients, and he trusted that she would not exhaust her own youth and joyousness in the effort. Perhaps she would succeed. He did not remember having heard of any scheme quite analogous, and possibly she would override all obstacles in triumph, and the patients who entered her home with the burden of their past misery heavy upon them, would develop in the sunshine of her presence into twelve riotously jovial ladies. But would not she herself suffer? Would not her own strength and hopefulness be sapped up by those she benefited? He could not think that it would be to the advantage of the world at large to substitute twelve, nay fifty, nay any number of jolly old ladies, for one girl with such sweet and joyous eyes. .

This, of course, was the purely masculine point of view. The women to be benefited—why he thought of them as old is not clear, for you need not be old to be unhappy—would have protested, probably, with

indignant cries that individually they were well worth Miss Estcourt, in any case were every bit as good as she was, and collectively—oh, absurd.

He thought of his sister Trudi. Perhaps she knew of someone who would be both kind and clever, and protect Miss Estcourt in some measure from the twelve. Trudi's friends, it is true, were not the sort among whom staid companions are found. Their husbands were chiefly lieutenants, and they spent their time at races. They lived in flats in Hanover, where the regiment was quartered, and flats are easy to manage, and none of these young women would endure, he supposed, to have an elderly companion always hanging round. Still, there was a remote possibility that some one of them might be able to recommend a suitable person. If Trudi were staying with him now she would be a great help; not so much because of what she would do, but because he could go with her to Kleinwalde, and Miss Estcourt could come to his house when she wanted anything, and need not depend solely on the parson. It was his duty, considering old Joachim's unchanging kindness towards him, and the pains the old man had taken to help him in the management of his estate, and to encourage him at a time when he greatly needed help and encouragement, to do all that lay in his power for old Joachim's niece. When he heard that she was coming he had



decided that this was his plain duty: that she was so pretty, so adorably pretty and simple and friendly, only made it an unusually pleasant one. "I will write to Trudi," he thought, "and ask her to come over for a week or two."

He sat down at his writing-table in the big window overlooking the farmyard, and began the letter. But he felt that it would be absurd to ask her to come on Miss Estcourt's account. Why should she do anything for Miss Estcourt, and why should he want his sister to do anything for her? That would be the first thing that would strike the astute Trudi. So he merely wrote reminding her that she had not stayed with him since the previous summer, and suggested that she should come for a few days with her children, now that the spring was coming and the snow had gone. "The woods will soon be blue with anemones," he wrote, though he well knew that Trudi's attitude towards anemones was cold. Perhaps her little boys would like to pick them; anyhow some sort of an inducement had to be held out.

Outside his window was a duck-pond, thin sheets of ice still floating in broken pieces on its surface; behind the duck-pond was the dairy; and on either side of the yard were cow-sheds and pig-styes. The farm carts stood in a peaceful Sunday row down one side, and at the other end of the yard, shutting out

the same view of the sea and island that Anna saw from her bedroom window, was a mountainous range of manure. When Trudi came, she never entered the rooms on this side of the house, because, as she explained, it was one of her peculiarities not to like manure; and she slept and ate and aired her opinions on the west side, where the garden lay between the house and the road. She never would have come to Lohm at all, not being burdened with any undue sentiment in regard to ties of blood, if it had not been necessary to go somewhere in the summer, and if the other places had not been beyond the resources of the family purse, always at its emptiest when the racing season was over and the card-playing at an end. As it was, this was a cheap and convenient haven, and her brother Axel was kind to the little boys, and not too angry when they plundered his apple-trees, damaged the knees of his ponies, and did their best to twist off the tails of his disconcerted sucking-pigs.

He was the eldest of three brothers, and she came last. She was twenty-six, and he was ten years older. When the father died, the land ought properly to have been divided between the four children, but such a proceeding would have been extremely inconvenient, and the two younger brothers, and the sister just married, agreed to accept their share in money, and to leave the estate entirely

to Axel. It was the best course to take, but it threw Axel into difficulties that continued for years. His father, with four times the money, had lived very comfortably at Lohm, and the children had been brought up in prosperity. For eight years his eldest son had farmed the estate with a quarter the means, and had found it so far from simple that his hair had turned grey in the process. It needed considerable skill and vigilance to enable a man to extract a decent living from the soil of Lohm. Part of it was too boggy, and part of it too sandy, and the trees had all been cut down thirty years before by a bland grandfather, serenely indifferent to the opinion of posterity. Axel's first work had been to make plantations of young firs and pines wherever the soil was poorest, and when he rode through the beautiful Kleinwalde forest he endeavoured to extract what pleasure he could from the thought that in a hundred years Lohm too would have a forest. But the pleasure to be extracted from this thought was of a surprisingly subdued quality. All his pleasures were of a subdued quality. His days were made up of hard work, of that effort to induce both ends to meet which knocks the savour out of life with such a singular completeness. He was born with an uncomfortably exact conception of duty; and now at the end of the best half of his life, after years of struggling on that poor soil against the odds of that

stern climate, this conception had shaped itself into a fixed belief that the one thing entirely beautiful, the one thing wholly worthy of a man's ambition, is the right doing of his duty. So, he thought, shall a man have peace at the last.

It is a way of thinking common to the educated dwellers in solitary places, who have not been very successful. Trudi scorned it. "Peace," she said, "at the last, is no good at all. What one wants is peace at the beginning and in the middle. But you only think stuff like that because you haven't got enough money. Poor people always talk about the beauty of duty and peace at the last. If somebody left you a fortune you'd never mention either of them again. Or if you married a girl with money, now. I wish, I do wish, that *that* duty would strike you as the one thing wholly worth doing."

But a man who is all day and every day in his fields, who farms not for pleasure but for his bare existence, has no time to set out in search of girls with money, and none came up his way. Besides, he had been engaged a few years before, and the girl had died, and he had not since had the least inclination towards matrimony. After that he had worked harder than ever; and the years flew by, filled with monotonous labour. Sometimes they were good years, and the ends not only met but lapped

over a little; but generally the bare meeting of the ends was all that he achieved. His wish was that his brother Gustav who came after him should find the place in good order; if possible in better order than before. But the working up of an estate for a brother Gustav, with whatever determination it may be carried on, is not a labour that evokes an unflagging enthusiasm in the labourer; and Axel, however beautiful a life of duty might be to him in theory, found it, in practice, of an altogether remarkable greyness. Two-thirds of his house were shut up. In the evenings his servants stole out to court and be courted, and left the place to himself and echoes and memories. It was a house built for a large family, for troops of children, and frequent friends. Axel sat in it alone when the dusk drove him indoors, defending himself against his remembrances by prolonged interviews with his head inspector, or a zealous study of the latest work on potato diseases.

"I see that Bibi Bornstedt is staying with your Regierungspräsident," Trudi had written a little while before. "Now, then, is your chance. She is a true gold-fish. You cannot continue to howl over Hildegard's memory for ever. Bibi will have two hundred thousand marks a year when the old ones die, and is quite a decent girl. Her nose is a fiasco, but when you have been married a week you will not so

much as see that she has a nose. And the two hundred thousand marks will still be there. *Ach*, Axel, what comfort, what consolation, in two hundred thousand marks! You could put the most glorious wreaths on Hildegard's tomb, besides keeping race-horses."

Lohm suddenly remembered this letter as he sat, having finished his own, looking out of the window at two girls in Sunday splendour kissing one of the stable-boys behind a farm cart. They were all three apparently enjoying themselves very much, the girls laughing, the boy with an expression at once imbecile and beatific. They thought the master's eye could not see them there, but the master's eye saw most things. He took up his pen again and added a postscript. "If you come soon you will be able to enjoy the society of your friend Bibi. She came on Wednesday, I believe." Then, feeling slightly ashamed of using the innocent Miss Bibi as a bait to catch his sister, he wrote the advertisement for Anna, and put both letters in the post-bag.

The effect of his postscript was precisely the one he had expected. Trudi was drinking her morning coffee in her bedroom at twelve o'clock, when the letter came. Her hair was being done by a *Friseur*, an artist in hairdressing, who rode about Hanover every day on a bicycle, his pockets bulging out with

curling-tongs, and for three marks decorated the heads of Trudi and her friends with innumerable waves. Trudi was devoted to him, with the devotion naturally felt for the person on whom one's beauty depends, for he was a true artist, and really did work amazing transformations. "What! You have never had Herr Jungbluth?" Trudi cried, on the last occasion on which she met Bibi, the daughter of a Hanover banker, and quite outside her set but for the riches that ensured her an enthusiastic welcome wherever she went, "*aber* Bibi!" There was so much genuine surprise and compassion in this *aber* Bibi that the young person addressed felt as though she had been for years missing a possibility of happiness. Trudi added, as a special recommendation, that Jungbluth smelt of soap. He had carefully studied the nature of women, and if he had to do with a pretty one would find an early opportunity of going into respectful raptures over what he described as her *klassisches Profil*; and if it was a woman whose face was not all she could have wished, he would tell her, in a tone of subdued enthusiasm, that her profile, as to which she had long been in doubt, was *höchst interessant*. The popularity of this young man in Trudi's set was enormous; and as all the less aristocratic Hanoverian ladies hastened to imitate, Jungbluth lived in great contentment and prosperity with a young wife whose hair was re-

posefully straight, and a baby whose godmother was Trudi.

"Blue woods! Anemones!" read Trudi with immense contempt. "Is the boy in his senses? The idea of expecting me to go to that dreary place now. Ah, now I understand," she added, turning the page, "it is Bibi—he is really after her, and of course can get along quicker if I am there to help. Excellent Axel! And why did he go to the pains of trotting out the anemones? What is the use of not being frank with me? I can see through him, whatever he does. He is so good-natured that I am sure he will lend us heaps of Bibi's money once he has got it. *So, lieber Jungbluth,*" she said aloud, "that will do to-day. Beautiful—beautiful—better than ever. I am in a hurry. I travel to Berlin this very afternoon."

And the next day she arrived at Stralsund, and was met by her brother at the station.

She greeted him with enthusiasm. "As we are here," she said, when they were driving through the town, "let us pay our respects to the Regierungs-präsidentin. It will save our coming in again to-morrow."

"No, I cannot to-day. I must get back as quickly as possible. The hands had their Easter ball yesterday, and when I left Lohm this morning half of them were still in bed."

"Well, then, the horses will have to do the journey again to-morrow, for no time should be lost."

"Yes, you can come in to-morrow, if you long so much to see your friend."

"And you?" asked Trudi, in a tone of astonishment.

"And I? I am up to my ears now in work. Last week was the first week for four months that we could plough. Now we have lost these three days at Easter. I cannot spare a single hour."

"But, my dear Axel, Bibi is of far greater importance for the future of Lohm than any amount of ploughing."

"I confess I do not see how."

"I don't understand you."

"Why didn't you bring the little boys?"

"What have you asked me to come here for?"

"Come, Trudi, you've not been near me for eight months. Isn't it natural that you should pay me a little visit?"

"No, it isn't natural at all to come to such a place in winter, and leave all the fun at home. I came because of Bibi."

"What! You'll come for Bibi, but not for your own brother?"

"Now, Axel, you know very well that I have come for you both."

"For us both? What would Miss Bibi say if she heard you talking of herself and of me as 'you both'?"

"I wish you would not bother to go on like this. It's a great waste of time."

"So it is, my dear. Any talk about Bibi Bornstedt, as far as I am concerned, is a hopeless waste of time."

"Axel!"

"Trudi!"

"You don't mean to say that you are not thinking of her?"

"Thinking of her? I never let my thoughts linger round strange young ladies."

"Then what in heaven's name have you got me here for?"

"The anemones are coming out——"

"*Ach*——"

"They really are."

"Suppose instead of teasing me as though I were still ten and you a great bully, you talked sensibly. The Hohensteins give a *bal masqué* to-night, and I gave it up to come to you."

"Oh, my dear, that was really kind," said Lohm, touched by the tremendousness of this sacrifice.

"Then be a good boy," said Trudi caressingly, edging herself closer to him, "and tell me you are going to be wise about Bibi. Don't throw such a chance away—it's positively wicked."

"My dear Trudi, you'll have us in the ditch. It is very nice when you lean against me, but I can't drive. By the way, you remember my old Kleinwalde neighbour? The old man who spoilt you so atrociously?"

"Bibi will make a most excellent wife," said Trudi, ungratefully indifferent to the memory of old Joachim. "Oh, what a cold wind there is to-day. Do drive faster, Axel. What a taste, to live here and to like it into the bargain!"

"You know that I must live here."

"But you needn't like it."

"You've heard that old Joachim left Kleinwalde to his English niece?"

"You have only seen Bibi once, and she grows on one tremendously."

"I want to talk about old Joachim."

"And I want to talk about Bibi."

"Well, Bibi can wait. She is the younger. You know about the old man's will?"

"I should think I did. One of his unfortunate sons has just joined our regiment. You should hear him on the subject."

"A most disagreeable, grasping lot," said Lohm

decidedly. "They received every bit of their dues, and are all well off. Surely the old man could do as he liked with the one place that was not entailed?"

"It isn't the usual thing to leave one's land to a foreigner. Is she coming to live in it?"

"She came last week."

"Oh?" This in a tone of sudden interest.

There was a pause. Then Trudi said, "Is she young?"

"Quite young."

"Pretty?"

"Exceedingly pretty."

Trudi looked up at him and smiled.

"Well?" said Axel, smiling back at her.

"Well?" said Trudi, continuing to smile.

Axel laughed outright. "My dear Trudi, your astuteness terrifies me. You not only know already why I wrote to you, but you know more reasons for the letter than I myself dream of. I want to be able to help this extremely helpless young lady, and I can hardly be of any use to her because I have no woman in the house. If I had a wife I could be of the greatest assistance."

"Only then you wouldn't want to be."

"Certainly I should."

"Pray, why?"

"Because I have a greater debt of obligations to her uncle than I can ever repay to his niece."

"Oh, nonsense—nobody pays their debts of obligations. The natural thing to do is to hate the person who has forced you to be grateful, and to get out of his way."

"My dear Trudi, this shrewdness——" murmured her brother. Then he added, "I know perfectly well that your thoughts have already flown to a wedding. Mine don't reach farther than an elderly companion."

"Who for? For you?"

"Miss Estcourt is looking for an elderly companion, and I would be grateful to you if you would help her."

"But the elderly companion does not exclude the wedding."

"When you see Miss Estcourt you will understand how completely such a possibility is outside her calculations. You won't of course believe that it is outside mine. Why should you want to marry me to every girl within reach? Five minutes ago it was Bibi, and now it is Miss Estcourt. You do not in the least consider what views the girls themselves might have. Miss Estcourt is absorbed at this moment in a search for twelve old ladies."

"Twelve——?"

"Her ambition is to spend herself and her money on twelve old ladies. She thinks happiness and money are as good for them as for herself, and wants to share her own with persons who have neither."

"My dear Axel—is she mad?"

"She did not give me that impression."

"And you say she is young?"

"Yes."

"And really pretty?"

"Yes."

"And could be so well off in that flourishing place!"

"Of course she could."

"I'll go and call on her to-morrow," said Trudi decidedly.

"It will be kind of you," said Lohm.

"Kind! It isn't kindness, it's curiosity," said Trudi with a laugh. "Let us be frank, and call things by their right names."

Anna was in the garden, admiring the first crocus, when Trudi appeared. She drove Axel's cobs up to the door in what she felt was excellent style, and hoped Miss Estcourt was watching her from a window and would see that Englishwomen were not the only sportswomen in the world. But Anna saw nothing but the crocus.

The wilderness down to the marsh that did duty

as a garden was so sheltered and sunny that spring stopped there first each year before going on into the forest; and Anna loved to walk straight out of the drawing-room window into it, bareheaded and coatless, whenever she had time. Trudi saw her coming towards the house upon the servant's telling her that a lady had called. "Nothing on, on a cold day like this!" she thought. She herself wore a particularly sporting driving-coat, with an immense collar turned up over her ears. "I wonder," mused Trudi, watching the approaching figure, "how it is that English girls, so tidy in the clothes, so trim in the shoes, so neat in the tie and collar, never apparently brush their hair. A German Miss Estcourt vegetating in this quiet place would probably wear grotesque and disconnected garments, doubtful boots and striking stockings, her figure would rapidly give way before the insidiousness of *Schweinebraten*, but her hair would always be beautifully done, each plait smooth and in its proper place, each little curl exactly where it ought to be, the parting a model of straightness, and the whole well deserving to be dignified by the name of *Frisur*. English girls have hair, but they do not have *Frisurs*."

Anna came in through the open window, and Trudi's face expanded into the most genial smiles. "How glad I am to make your acquaintance!" she cried, enthusiastically. She spoke English quite as

correctly as her brother, and much more glibly. "I hope you will let me help you if I can be of any use. My brother says your uncle was so good to him. When I lived here he was very kind to me too. How brave of you to stay here! And what wonderful plans you have made! My brother has told me about your twelve ladies. What courage to undertake to make twelve women happy. I find it hard enough work making one person happy."

"One person? Oh, Graf Hasdorf."

"Oh no, myself. You see, if each person devoted his energies to making himself happy, everybody would be happy."

"No, they wouldn't," said Anna, "because they do, but they're not."

They looked at each other and laughed. "She only needs Jungbluth to be perfect," thought Trudi; and with her usual impulsiveness began immediately to love her.

Anna was delighted to meet someone of her own class and age after the severe though short course she had had of Dellwigs and Manskes; and Trudi was so much interested in her plans, and so pressing in her offers of help, that she very soon found herself telling her all her difficulties about servants, sheets, wall-papers, and whitewash. "Look at this paper," she said, "could you live in the same room with it? No one will ever be able to feel cheerful as long

as it is here. And the one in the dining-room is worse."

"It isn't beautiful," said Trudi, examining it, "but it is what we call *praktisch*."

"Then I don't like what you call *praktisch*."

"Neither do I. All the hideous things are *praktisch*—oil-cloth, black wall-papers, handkerchiefs a yard square, thick boots, ugly women—if ever you hear a woman praised as a *praktische Frau* be sure she's frightful in every way—ugly and dull. The uglier she is the *praktischer* she is. Oh," said Trudi, casting up her eyes, "how terrible, how tragic, to be an ugly woman!" Then, bringing her gaze down again to Anna's face, she added, "My flat in Hanover is all pinks and blues—the most becoming rooms you can imagine. I look so nice in them."

"Pinks and blues? That is just what I want here. Can't I get any in Stralsund?"

Trudi was doubtful. She could not think it possible that anybody should ever get anything in Stralsund.

"But I must do my shopping there. I am in such a hurry. It would be dreadful to have to keep anyone waiting only because my house isn't ready."

"Well, we can try," said Trudi. "You will let me go with you, won't you?"

"I shall be more than grateful if you will come."

"What do you think if we went now?" suggested Trudi, always for prompt action, and quickly tired of sitting still. "My brother said I might drive into Stralsund to-day if I liked, and I have the cobs here now. Don't you think it would be a good thing, as you are in such a hurry?"

"Oh, a very good thing," exclaimed Anna. "How kind you are. You are sure it won't bore you frightfully?"

"Oh, not a bit. It will be rather amusing to go into those shops for once, and I shall like to feel that I have helped the good work on a little."

Anna thought Trudi delightful. Trudi's new friends always did think her delightful; and she never had any old ones.

She drove recklessly, and they lurched and heaved through the sand between Kleinwalde and Lohm at an alarming rate. They passed Letty and Miss Leech, going for their afternoon walk, who stood on one side and stared.

"Who's that?" asked Trudi.

"My brother's little girl and her governess."

"Oh yes, I heard about them. They are to stay and take care of you till you have a companion. Your sister-in-law didn't like Kleinwalde?"

"No."

Trudi laughed.

They passed Dellwig, riding, who swept off his hat with his customary deference, and stared.

"Do you like him?" asked Trudi.

"Who?"

"Dellwig. I know him from the days before I married."

"I don't know him very well yet," said Anna, "but he seems to be very—very polite."

Trudi laughed again, and cracked her whip.

"My uncle had great faith in him," said Anna, slightly aggrieved by the laugh.

"Your uncle was one of the best farmers in Germany, I have always heard. He was so experienced, and so clever, that he could have led a hundred Dellwigs round by the nose. Dellwig was naturally quite small, as we say, in the presence of your uncle. He knew very well it would be useless to be anything but immaculate under such a master. Perhaps your uncle thought he would go on being immaculate from sheer habit, with nobody to look after him."

"I suppose he did," said Anna doubtfully. "He told me to keep him. It's quite certain that *I* can't look after him."

They passed Axel Lohm, also riding. He was on Trudi's side of the road. He looked pleased when he saw Anna with his sister. Trudi whipped

up the cobs, regardless of his feelings, and tore past him, scattering the sand right and left. When she was abreast of him, she winked her eye at him with perfect solemnity.

Axel looked stony.

CHAPTER XL

NEITHER Trudi nor Anna had ever worked so hard as they did during the few days that ended March and began April. Everything seemed to happen at once. The house was in a sudden uproar. There were people whitewashing, people painting, people putting up papers, people bringing things in carts from Stralsund, people trimming up the garden, people coming out to offer themselves as servants, Dellwig coming in and shouting, Manske coming round and glorifying—Anna would have been completely bewildered if it had not been for Trudi, who was with her all day long, going about with a square of lace and muslin tucked under her waist-ribbon which she felt was becoming and said was an apron.

Trudi was enjoying herself hugely. She saw Jungbluth's waves slowly straightening themselves out of her hair, and for the first time in her life remained calm as she watched them go. She even began to have aspirations towards Uncle Joachim's better life herself, and more than once entered into a serious

consideration of the advantages that might result from getting rid at one stroke of Bill her husband, and Billy and Tommy her two sons, and from making a fresh start as one of Anna's twelve.

Frau Manske and Frau Dellwig could not face her infinite superciliousness more than once, and kept out of the way in spite of their burning curiosity. When Dellwig's shouts became intolerable, she did not hesitate to wince conspicuously, and to put up her hand to her head. When Manske forgot that it was not Sunday, and began to preach, she would interrupt him with a brisk "*Ja, ja, sehr schön, sehr schön, aber lieber Herr Pastor*, you must tell us all this next Sunday in church when we have time to listen—my friend has not a minute now in which to appreciate the opinions of the *Apostel Paulus*."

"I believe you are being unkind to my parson," said Anna, who could not always understand Trudi's rapid German, but saw that Manske went away dejected.

"My dear, he must be kept in his place if he tries to come out of it. You don't know what a set these pastors are. They are not like your clergymen. If you are too kind to that man you'll have no peace. I remember in my father's time he came to dinner every Sunday, sat at the bottom of the table, and when the pudding appeared made a bow and went away."

"He didn't like pudding?"

"I don't know if he liked it or not, but he never got any. It was a good old custom that the pastor should withdraw before the pudding, and Axel has not kept it up. My father never had any bother with him."

"But what has the pudding that he didn't get ten years ago to do with your being unkind to him now?"

"I wanted to explain the proper footing for him to be on."

"And the proper footing is a puddingless one? Well, in my house neither pudding nor kindness in suitable quantities shall be withheld from him, so don't ill-use him more than you feel is absolutely necessary for his good."

"Oh, you are a dear little thing!" said Trudi, putting her hands on Anna's shoulders and looking into her eyes—they were both tall young women, and their eyes were on a level—"I wonder what the end of you will be. When you know all these people better you'll see that my way of treating them, which you think unkind, is the only way. You must turn up your nose as high as it will go at them, and they will burst with respect. Don't be too friendly and confiding—they won't understand it, and will be sure to think that something must be wrong about you, and will begin to backbite you, and invent all sorts of horrid stories about you. And as for the pastor,

why should he be allowed to treat your rooms as though they were so many pulpits, and you as though you had never heard of the *Apostel Paulus!*''

Anna admitted that she was not always in the proper frame of mind for these unprovoked sermons, but refused to believe in the necessity for turning up her nose. She ostentatiously pressed Manske, the very next time he came, to stay to the evening meal, which was rather of the nature of a picnic in those unsettled days, but at which, for Letty's sake, there was always a pudding; and she invited him to eat pudding three times running, and each time he accepted the offer; and each time, when she had helped him, she fixed her eyes with a defiant gravity on Trudi's face.

Axel came in sometimes when he had business at the farm, and was shown what progress had been made. Trudi was as interested as though it had been her own house, and took him about, demanding his approval and admiration with an enthusiasm that spread to Anna, and she and Axel soon became good friends. The Stralsund wall-papers were so dreadful that Anna had declared she would have most of the rooms whitewashed; the hall had been done, exchanging its pea-green coat for one of virgin purity, and she had thought it so fresh and clean, and so appropriate to the simplicity of the better life, that to the amazement of the workmen she in-

sisted on the substitution of whitewash in both dining and drawing-room for the handsome chocolate-coloured papers already in those rooms.

"The twelve will think it frightful," said Trudi.

"But why?" asked Anna, who had fallen in love with whitewash. "It is purity itself. It will be symbolical of the innocence and cleanliness that will be in our hearts when we have got used to each other, and are happy."

Trudi looked again at the hall, into which the afternoon sun was streaming. It did look very clean, certainly, and exceedingly cheerful; she was sure, however, that it would never be symbolical of any heart that came into it. But then Trudi was sceptical about hearts.

At the end of Easter week, when Trudi was beginning to feel slightly tired of whitewash and scrambled meals, and to have doubts as to the permanent becomingness of aprons, and misgivings as to the effect on her complexion of running about a cold house all day long, answers to the advertisements began to arrive, and soon arrived in shoals. These letters acted as bellows on the flickering flame of her zeal. She found them extraordinarily entertaining, and would meet Manske in the hall when he brought them round, and take them out of his hands, and run with them to Anna, leaving him standing there uncertain whether he ought to stay and be consulted,

or whether it was expected of him that he should go home again without having unburdened himself of all the advice he felt that he contained. He deplored what he called *das impulsive Temperament* of the Gräfin. Always had she been so, since the days she climbed his cherry-trees and helped the birds to strip them; and when, with every imaginable precaution, he had approached her father on the subject, and carefully excluding the word cherry hinted that the climbing of trees was a perilous pastime for young ladies, old Lohm had burst into a loud laugh, and had sworn that neither he nor anyone else could do anything with Trudi. He actually had seemed proud that she should steal cherries, for he knew very well why she climbed the trees, and predicted a brilliant future for his only daughter; to which Manske had listened respectfully as in duty bound, and had gone home unconvinced.

But Anna did not let him stand long in the hall, and came to fetch him and beg him to help her read the letters and tell her what he thought of them. In spite of Trudi's advice and example she continued to treat the pastor with the deference due to a good and simple man. What did it matter if he talked twice as much as he need have done, and wearied her with his habit of puffing Christianity as though it were a quack medicine of which he was the special patron? He was sincere, he really believed some-

thing, and really felt something, and after five days with Trudi Anna turned to Manske's elementary convictions with relief. In five days she had come to be very glad that Trudi stood in no need of a place among the twelve.

Most of the women who wrote in answer to the advertisement sent photographs, and their letters were pitiful enough, either because of what they said or because of what they tried to hide; and Anna's appreciation of Trudi received a great shock when she found that the letters amused her, and that the photographs, especially those of the old ones or the ugly ones, moved her to a mirth little short of unseemly. After all, Trudi was taking a great deal upon herself, Anna thought, reading the letters unasked, helping her to open them unasked, hurrying down to fetch them unasked, and deluging her with advice about them unasked. She saw she had made a mistake in allowing her to see them at all. She had no right to expose the petitions of these unhappy creatures to Trudi's inquisitive and diverted eyes. This fact was made very patent to her when one of the letters that Trudi opened turned out to be from a person she had known. "Why," cried Trudi, her face twinkling with excitement, "here's one from a girl who was at school with me. And her photo too—what a shocking scarecrow she has grown into! She is only two years older than I am, but might be forty. Just look at

her—and she used to think none of us were good enough for her. Don't have her, whatever you do—she married one of the officers in Bill's first regiment, and treated him so shamefully that he shot himself. Imagine her boldness writing like this!" And she began eagerly to read the letter.

Anna got up and took it out of her hands. It was an unexpected action, or Trudi would have held on tighter. "She never dreamed you would see what she wrote," said Anna, "and it would be dishonourable of me to let you. And the other letters too—I have been thinking it over—they are only meant for me; and no one else, except perhaps the parson, ought to see them."

"Except perhaps the parson!" cried Trudi, greatly offended. "And why except perhaps the parson?"

"I can't always read the German writing," explained Anna.

"But surely a woman of your own age, who isn't such a simpleton as the parson, is the best adviser you can have."

"But you laugh at the letters, and they are all so unhappy."

Trudi went back to Lohm early that day. "She has taken it into her head that I am not to read the letters," she said to her brother with no little indignation.

"It would be a great breach of confidence if she allowed you to," he replied; which was so unsatisfactory that she drove into Stralsund that very afternoon, and consoled herself with the pliable Bibi.

Bibi's nose seemed more unsuccessful than ever after having had Anna's before her for nearly a week; but then the richness of the girl! And such a good-natured, generous girl, who would adore her sister-in-law and make her presents. Contemplating the good Bibi in her afternoon splendour from Paris, Trudi's heart stirred within her at the thought of all that was within Axel's reach if only he could be induced to put out his hand and take it. Anna would never marry him, Trudi was certain—would never marry anyone, being completely engrossed by her philanthropic follies; but if she did, what was her probable income compared to Bibi's? And Axel would never look at Bibi so long as that other girl lived next door to him; nobody could expect him to. Anna was too pretty; it was not fair. And Bibi was so very plain; which was not fair either.

The Regierungspräsidentin, a cousin by marriage of Bibi's, but a member of an ancient family of the Mark, was delighted to see Trudi and to question her about the new and eccentric arrival. Trudi had offered to take Anna to call on this lady, and had explained that it was her duty to call; but Anna had said there was no hurry, and had talked of some day,

and had been manifestly bored by the prospect of making new acquaintances.

"Is she quite—quite in her right senses?" asked the Regierungspräsidentin, when Trudi had described all they had been doing in Anna's house, and all Anna meant to do with her money, and had made her description so smart and diverting that the Regierungspräsidentin, an alert little lady, with ears perpetually pricked up in the hope of catching gossip, felt that she had not enjoyed an afternoon so much for years.

Bibi sat listening with her mouth wide open. It was an artless way of hers when she was much interested in a conversation, and was deplored by those who wished her well.

"Oh yes, she is quite in her senses. Rather too sure she knows best, always, but quite in her senses."

"Then she is very religious?"

"Not in the ordinary way, I should think. She goes in for nature. *Gott in der Natur*, and that sort of thing. If the sun shines more than usual she goes and stands in it, and turns up her eyes and gushes. There's a crocus in the garden and when we came to it yesterday she stopped in front of it and rhapsodised for ten minutes about things that have nothing to do with crocuses—chiefly about the *lieben Gott*. And all in English, of course, and its sounds worse in English."

"But then, my dear, she *is* religious?"

"Oh, well, the pastor would not call it religion. It's a sort of huddle-muddle pantheism as far as it is anything at all." From which it will be seen that Trudi was even more frank about her friends behind their backs than she was to their faces.

She drove back to Lohm in a discontented frame of mind. "What's the good of anything?" was the mood she was in. She had over-tired herself helping Anna, and she was afraid that being so much in cold rooms and passages, and washing in hard water, had made her skin coarse. She had caught sight of herself in a glass as she was leaving the Regierungs-präsidentin, and had been disconcerted by finding that she did not look as pretty as she felt. Nor was she consoled for this by the consciousness that she had been unusually amusing at Anna's expense; for she was only too certain that the Regierungs-präsidentin, when repeating all she had told her to her friends, would add that Trudi Hasdorf had terribly *eingepackt*—dreadful word, descriptive of the faded state immediately preceding wrinkles, and held in just abhorrence by every self-respecting woman. Of what earthly use was it to be cleverer and more amusing than other people if at the same time you had *eingepackt*?

"What a stupid world it is," thought Trudi, driving ~~down~~ the *chaussée* in the early April twilight. A

mist lay over the sea, and the pale sickle of the young moon rose ghost-like above the white shroud. Inland the stars were faintly shining, and all the earth beneath was damp and fragrant. It was Saturday evening, and the two bells of Lohm Church were plaintively ringing their reminder to the countryside that the week's work was ended, and God's day came next. "Oh, the stupid world," thought Trudi. "If I stay here I shall be bored to death—that Estcourt child and her governess have got onto my nerves—horrid fat child with turned-in toes, and flabby, boneless woman, only held together by her hair-pins. I am sick of governesses and children—wherever one goes, there they are. If I go home, there are those noisy little boys and Fräulein Schultz worrying all day, and then there's that tiresome Bill coming in to meals. Anna and Bibi are just in the position I would like to be in—no husbands and children, and lots of money." And staring straight before her, with eyes dark with envy, she fell into gloomy musings on the beauty of Bibi's dress, and the blindness of fate, throwing away a dress like that on a Bibi, when it was so eminently suited to tall, slim women like herself; and it was fortunate for Axel's peace that when she reached Lohm the first thing she saw was a letter from the objectionable Bill telling her to come home, because the foreign prince who was honorary colonel of the regiment was

expected immediately in Hanover, and there were to be great doings in his honour.

She left, all smiles, the next morning by the first train.

"Miss Estcourt will miss you," said Axel, "and will wonder why you did not say good-bye. I am afraid your journey will be unpleasant, too, to-day. I wish you had stayed till to-morrow."

"Oh, I don't mind the Sunday people once in a way," said Trudi, gaily. "And please tell Anna how it was I had to go so suddenly. I have started her, at least, with the workmen and people she wants. I shall see her in a few weeks again, you know, when Bill is at the manoeuvres."

"A few weeks! Six months."

"Well, six months. You must both try to exist without me for that time."

"You seem very pleased to be off," he said smiling, as she climbed briskly into the dogcart and took the reins, while her maid, with her arms full of bags, was hoisted up behind.

"Oh, so pleased!" said Trudi, looking down at him with sparkling eyes. "Princes and parties are jollier any day than whitewash and the better life."

"And brothers."

"Oh—brothers. By the way, I never saw Bibi look better than she did yesterday. She has improved so much nobody would know——"

"You will miss your train," said Axel, pulling out his watch.

"Well, good-bye then, *alter Junge*. Work hard, do your duty, and don't let your thoughts linger too much round strange young ladies. They never do, I think you said? Well, so much the better, for it's no good, no good, no good!" And Trudi, who was in tremendous spirits, put her whip to the brim of her hat by way of a parting salute, touched up the cobs, and rattled off down the drive on the road to Jungbluth and glory. She turned her head before she finally disappeared, to call back her oracular "No good!" once again to Axel, who stood watching her from the steps of his solitary house.

CHAPTER XII.

So Anna was left to herself again. She was astonished at the rapidity of Trudi's movements. Within one week she had heard of her, met her, begun to like her less, and lost her. She had flashed across the Kleinwalde horizon, and left a trail of workmen and new servants behind, with whom Anna was now occupied, unaided, from morning till night. Miss Leech and Letty did all they could, but their German being restricted to quotations from the *Erlkönig* and the *Lied von der Glocke*, it could not be brought to bear with any profitable results on the workmen. The servants, too, were a perplexity to Anna. Their cheapness was extraordinary, but their quality curious. Her new parlour-maid—for she felt unequal to coping with German menservants—wore her arms naked all day long. Anna thought she had tucked up her sleeves in her zeal for thoroughness, but when she appeared with the afternoon coffee—the local tea was undrinkable—she still had bare arms; and, examining her more closely, Anna

saw that it was her usual state, for her dress was sleeveless. Nor was her want of sleeves her only peculiarity. Anna began to wonder whether her house would ever be ready for the twelve.

The answers to the philanthropic advertisement were in a proportion of fifty to one answer to the advertisement for a companion. There were fifty ladies without means willing to be idle, to one lady without means willing to work. It worried Anna terribly, being obliged by want of room and money to limit the number to twelve. She could hardly bear to read the letters, knowing that nearly all had to be rejected. "See how many sad lives are being dragged through while we are so comfortable," she said to Manske, when he brought round fresh piles of letters to add to those already heaped on her table.

He shook his head in perplexity. He was bewildered by the masses of answers, by the apparent universality of impoverishment and hopelessness among Christian ladies of good family.

He could not come himself more than once a day, and the letters arrived by every post; so in the afternoon he sent Herr Klutz, the young cleric of poetic promptings, who had celebrated Anna on her arrival in a poem which for freshness and spontaneity equalled, he considered, the best sonnets that had ever been written. What a joy it was to a youth

of imagination, to a poet who thought his features not unlike Goethe's, and who regarded it as by no means an improbability that his brain should turn out to be stamped with the same resemblance, to walk daily through the gleaming, whispering forest, swinging his stick and composing snatches not unworthy of her of whom they treated, his face towards the magic *Schloss* and its enchanted princess, and his pockets full of her letters! Herr Klutz's coat was clerical, but his brown felt hat and the flower in his buttonhole were typical of the worldliness within. "A poet," he assured himself often, "is a citizen of the world, and is not to be narrowed down to any one circle or creed." But he did not expound this view to the good man who was helping him to prepare for the examination that would make him a full-fledged pastor, and received his frequent blessings, and assisted at prayers and intercessions of which he was the subject, with outward decorum.

The first time he brought the letters, Anna received him with her usual kindness; but there was something in his manner that displeased her, whether it was self-assurance, or conceit, or a way he had of looking at her, she could not tell, nor did she waste many seconds trying to decide; but the next day when he came he was not admitted to her presence, nor the next after that, nor for some time to come. This surprised Herr Klutz, who was of Dellwig's

opinion that the most superior woman was not equal to the average man; and take away any advantage of birth or position or wealth that she might possess, why, there she was, only a woman, a creature made to be conquered and brought into obedience to man. Being young and poetic he differed from Dellwig on one point; to Dellwig, woman was a servant; to Klutz, an admirable toy. Clearly such a creature could only be gratified by opportunities of seeing and conversing with members of the opposite sex. The Miss's conduct, therefore, in allowing her servant to take the letters from him at the door, puzzled him.

He often met Miss Leech and Letty on his way to or from Kleinwalde, and always stopped to speak to them and to teach them a few German sentences and practise his own small stock of English; and from them he easily discovered all that the young woman he favoured with his admiration was doing. Lohm, riding over to Kleinwalde to settle differences between Dellwig and the labourers, or to try offenders, met these three several times, and supposed that Klutz must be courting the governess.

The day Trudi left, Lohm had gone round to Anna and delivered his sister's message in a slightly embellished form. "You will have everything to do now unassisted," he said. "I do trust that in any difficulty you will let me help you. If the workmen

are insolent, for instance, or if your new servants are dishonest or in any way give you trouble. You know it is my duty as Amtsvorsteher to interfere when such things happen."

"You are very kind," said Anna gratefully, looking up at the grave, good face, "but no one is insolent. And look—here is someone who wants to come as companion. It is the first of the answers to that advertisement that pleases me."

Lohm took the letter and photograph and examined them. "She is a Penheim, I see," he said. "It is a very good family, but some of its branches have been reduced to poverty, as so many of our old families have been."

"Don't you think she would do very well?"

"Yes, if she is and does all she says in her letter. You might propose that she should come at first for a few weeks on trial. You may not like her, and she may not appreciate philanthropic house-keeping."

Anna laughed. "I am doubly anxious to get someone soon," she said, "because my sister-in-law wants Letty and Miss Leech."

Letty and Miss Leech heaved tragic sighs at this; they had no desire whatever to go home.

"Will you not feel rather forlorn when they are gone, and you are quite alone among strangers?"

"I shall miss them, but I don't mean to be forlorn," said Anna, smiling.

"The courage of the little thing!" thought Lohm; "Ready to brave anything in pursuit of her ideals. It makes one ashamed of one's own grumblings and discouragements."

Anna arranged with Frau von Penheim that she should come at once on a three months' trial; and immediately this was settled she wrote to Susie to ask what day Letty was to be sent home. She had had no communication with Susie since that angry lady's departure. To Peter she had written, explaining her plans and her reasons, and her hopes and yearnings, and had received a hasty scrawl in reply dated from Estcourt, conveying his blessing on herself and her scheme. "Susie came straight down here," he wrote, "because of the Alderton wedding, to which she was not asked, and went to bed. You know, my dear little sister, anything that makes you happy contents me. I wish you could have seen your way to benefiting reduced English ladies, for you are a long way off; but of course you have the house free over there. Don't let Miss Leech leave you till you are perfectly satisfied with your companion. Yesterday I landed the biggest——" etc. In a word, Peter, in accordance with his invariable custom, was on her side.

The day before Frau von Penheim was to arrive, Susie's answer to Anna's letter came. Here it is:—

"DEAR ANNA—Your letter surprised me, though I might have known by now what to expect of you. Still, I was surprised that you should not even offer to make the one return in your power for all I have done for you. As I feel I have a right to some return I don't hesitate to tell you that I think you ought to keep Letty for a year or two, or even longer. Even if you kept her till she is eighteen, and dressed her and fed her (don't feed her too much), it would only be four years; and what are four years I should like to know, compared to the fifteen I had you on my hands? I was talking to Herr Schumpf about her the other day—his bills were so absurd that I made him take something off—and he said by all means let her stay in Germany. Everybody speaks German nowadays, and Letty will pick it up at once in that awful place of yours. I was so ill when I got back that I went to Estcourt, and had to stay in bed for days, the doctor coming every day, and sometimes twice. He said he didn't wonder, when I told him all I had gone through. Peter was quite sorry for me. Send Miss Leech back. Give her a month's notice for me the day you get this, and see if you can't find some German who will go to your place—I can't remember its wretched name

without looking in my address-book—and give Letty lessons every day. The rest of the time she can talk German to your twelve victims. I believe masters in Germany only charge about 6d. an hour, so it won't ruin you. Make her take lots of exercise, and let her ride. She has outgrown her old habit, but German tailors are so cheap that a new one will cost next to nothing, and any horse that shakes her up well will do. I shall be quite happy about her diet, because I know you don't have anything to eat. I was at the Ennistons' last night. They seemed very sorry for me being so nearly related to somebody cracked; but after all, as I tell people, I'm not responsible for my husband's relations.—Your affectionate.

SUSIE ESTCOURT."

"I have never seen Hilton so upset as she was after that German trip. She cried if anyone looked at her. Poor thing, no wonder. The doctor says she is all nerves."

The evening meal was in progress at Kleinwalde when this letter came. The dining-room was finished, and it was the first meal served there since its transformation. No one who had seen it on that dark day of Anna's arrival would have recognised it, so cheerful did it look with its whitewashed walls.

There were no dark corners now where china shepherds smiled in vain; the western light filled it, and to a person lately come from Susie's Hill Street house, it was a refreshment to sit in any place so simple and so clean. Reforms, too, had been made in the food, and the bread was no longer disfigured by caraway seeds. A great bowl of blue hepaticas, fresh from the forest, stood on the table; and the hepaticas were the exact colour of Anna's eyes. When Letty saw her mother's handwriting she turned cold. It was the warrant that was to banish her from Eden, casting her back into the outer darkness of the Popular Concerts and the literature lectures. She was in the act of raising a spoonful of pudding to her already opened mouth, when she caught sight of the well-known writing. She hesitated, her hand shook, and finally she laid her spoon down again and pushed her plate back. At the great crises of life who can go on eating pudding? What then was her relief and joy to see her aunt get up, come round to where she was sitting braced to hear the worst, put her arms round her neck, and to feel herself being kissed. "You are going to stay with me after all!" cried Anna delightedly. "Dear little Letty—I should have missed you horribly. Aren't you glad? Your mother says I'm to keep you for ever so long."

"Oh, I say—how ripping!" exclaimed Letty; and

being a practical person at once resumed and finished her pudding.

Miss Leech, too, looked exceedingly pleased. How could she be anything but pleased at the prospect of staying with a person who was always so kind and thoughtful as Anna? Her feelings, somehow, were never hurt by Anna: Lady Estcourt seemed to have a special knack of jumping on them every time she spoke to her. She knew she ought not to have such sensitive feelings, and felt that it was more her fault than anyone else's if they were hurt; yet there they were, and being hurt was painful, and living with someone so even tempered as Anna was very peaceful and pleasant. Mr. Jessup would have liked Anna. She wished he could have known her. A higher compliment it was not in Miss Leech's power to pay.

And when Anna saw the pleasure on Miss Leech's face, and saw that she thought she was to stay too, she felt that for no sister-in-law in the world would she wipe it out with that month's notice. She decided to say nothing, but simply to keep her as well as Letty. Her two thousand a year was in her eyes of infinite elasticity. Never having had any money, she had no notion of how far it would go; and she did not hesitate to come to a decision which would probably ultimately oblige her to reduce the number of those persons Susie described as victims.

The next day the companion arrived. Anna went out into the hall to meet her when she heard the approaching wheels of the shepherd-plaid chariot. She felt rather nervous as she watched her emerging from beneath the hood, for she knew how much of the comfort and peace of the twelve would depend on this lady. She felt exceedingly nervous when the lady, immediately upon shaking hands, asked if she could speak to her alone.

"*Natürlich,*" said Anna, a vague fear lest Fritz, the coachman, should have insulted her on the way coming over her, though she only knew Fritz as the mildest of men.

She led the way into the drawing-room. "Now what is she going to tell me dreadful?" she thought, as she invited her to sit on the sofa, having been instructed by Trudi that that was the place where strangers expected to sit. "Suppose she isn't going to stay, and I shall have to look for someone all over again? Perhaps the lining of the carriage has been too much for her. *Bitte,*" she said aloud, with an uneasy smile, motioning Frau von Penheim towards the sofa.

The new companion was a big, elderly lady with a sensible face. Her boots were thick, and she wore a mackintosh. She sat down, and looking more attentively at Anna, smiled. Most people who saw her for the first time did that. It was such a change

and a pleasure after seeing plain faces, and dull faces, and vain, pretty faces for an indefinite period, to rest one's eyes on a person so charming yet manifestly preoccupied by other matters than her charms.

"I feel it my duty," said the lady in German, "before we go any further to tell you the truth."

This was alarming. The lady's manner was solemn. Anna inclined her head, and felt scared. She wished that Axel Lohm were somewhere near.

"I see you are young," continued the lady, "and I presume that you are inexperienced."

"Not so young," murmured Anna, who felt particularly young and uncomfortable at that moment, and very unlike the mistress of a house interviewing a companion. "Not so young—twenty-five."

"Twenty-five? You do not look it. But what is twenty-five?"

Anna did not know, so said nothing.

"My position here would be a responsible one," continued the lady, scrutinising Anna's face, and smiling again at what she saw there. "Taking charge of a motherless girl always is. And the circumstances in this case are peculiar."

"Yes," said Anna, "they are even more peculiar than you imagine——" And she was about to explain the approaching advent of the victims when the lady held up her hand in a masterful way, as though enjoining silence, and said, "First hear me. Through

a series of misfortunes I have been reduced to poverty since my husband's death. But I do not choose to live on the charity of relatives, which is the most unbearable form of charity calling itself by that holy name, and I am determined to work for my bread."

She paused. Anna could find nothing better to say than "Oh."

"Out of consideration for my relatives, who are enraged at my resolution, and think I ought to starve quietly on what they choose to give me sooner than make myself conspicuous by working, I have called myself Frau von Penheim. I will not come here under false pretences, and to you, privately, I will confess that my proper title is the Princess Ludwig, of that house."

She stopped to observe the effect of this announcement. Anna was confounded. A princess was not at all what she wanted. She felt that she had no use whatever for princesses. How could she ever expect one to get up early and see that the twelve received their meat in due season? "Oh," she said again, and then was silent.

The princess watched her closely. She was very poor, and very anxious to have the place. "Oh is so English," she said, smiling to hide her anxiety. "We say '*ach*.'"

Anna laughed.

"And do not think that all German princesses

are like your English ones," she went on eagerly. "My father-in-law was raised to the rank of Fürst for services rendered to the state. He had a large family, and my husband was a younger son."

Still Anna was silent. Then she said "I—I wish——" and then stopped.

"What do you wish, my dear child?"

"I wish—that I—that you——"

"That you had known it beforehand? Then you would never have taken me, even on trial," was the prompt reply.

Anna's eyes said plainly, "No, I would not."

"And it is so important that I should find something to do. At first I answered advertisements in my real name, and received my photograph back by the next post. This, and the anger of my family, decided me to drop the title altogether. But I had always resolved that if I did find a place I would confess to my employer. It is a terrible thing to be very poor," she added, staring straight before her with eyes growing dim at her remembrances.

"Yes," said Anna, under her breath.

"To have nothing, nothing at all, and to be burdened at the same time by one's birth."

"Oh," murmured Anna, with a little catch in her voice.

"And to be dependent on people who only wish that you were safely out of the way—dead."

"Married," whispered Anna.

"Why, what do you know about it?" said the princess, turning quickly to her; for she had been thinking aloud rather than addressing anyone.

"I know everything about it," said Anna; and in a rush of bad but eager German she told her of those old days when even the sweeping of crossings had seemed better than living on relations, and how since then all her heart had been filled with pity for the type of poverty called genteel, and how, now that she was well off, she was going to help women who were in the same sad situation in which she had been. Her eyes were wet when she finished. She had spoken with extraordinary enthusiasm, a fresh wave of passionate sympathy with such lives passing over her; and not until she had done did she remember that she had never before seen this lady, and that she was saying things to her that she had not as yet said to the most intimate of her friends.

She felt suddenly uncomfortable; her eyelashes quivered and drooped, and she blushed.

The princess contemplated her curiously. "I congratulate you," she said, laying her hand lightly for a moment on Anna's. "The idea and the good intentions will have been yours, whatever the result may be."

This was not very encouraging as a response to an outburst. "I have told you more than I tell

most people," Anna said, looking up shamefacedly, "because you have had much the same experiences that I have."

"Except the uncle at the end. He makes such a difference. May I ask if many of the ladies answered *both* advertisements?"

"No, they did not."

"Not one?"

"Not one."

The princess thought that working for one's bread was distinctly preferable to taking Anna's charity; but then she was of an unusually sturdy and independent nature. "I can assure you," she said after a short silence, "that I would do my best to look after your house and your—your friends and yourself."

"But I want someone who will do *everything*—order the meals, train the servants—everything. And get up early besides," said Anna, her voice full of doubt. The princess really belonged, she felt, to the category of sad, sick, and sorry; and if she had asked for a place among the twelve there would have been little difficulty in giving her one. But the companion she had imagined was to be a real help, someone she could order about as she chose, certainly not a person unused to being ordered about. Even the parson's sister-in-law Helena would have been better than this.

"I would do all that, naturally. Do you think if I am not too proud to take wages that I shall be too proud to do the work for which they are paid?"

"Would you not prefer——" began Anna, and hesitated.

"Would I not prefer what, my child?"

"Prefer to—would it not be more agreeable for you to come and live here without working? I could find another companion, and I would be happy if you will stay here as—as one of the others."

The princess laughed; a hearty, big laugh in keeping with her big person.

"No," she said. "I would not like that at all. But thank-you, dear child, for making the offer. Let me stay here and do what work you want done, and then you pay me for it, and we are quits. I assure you there is a solid satisfaction in being quits. I shall certainly not expect any more consideration than you would give to a Frau Schultz. And I will be able to take care of you; and I think, if you will not be angry with me for saying so, that you greatly need taking care of."

"Well then," said Anna, with an effort, "let us try it for three months."

An immense load was lifted off the princess's heart by these words. "You will not regret it," she said emphatically.

But Anna was not so sure. Though she did her best to put a cheerful face on her new bargain she could not help fearing that her enterprise had begun badly. She was unusually pensive throughout the evening.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT the Princess Ludwig thought of her new place it would be difficult to say. She accepted her position as minister to the comforts of the hitherto comfortless without remark and entirely as a matter of course. She got up at hours exemplary in their earliness, and was about the house rattling a bunch of keys all day long. She was wholly practical, and as destitute of illusions as she was of education in the ordinary sense. Her knowledge of German literature was hardly more extensive than Letty's, and of other tongues and other literatures she knew and cared nothing. As for illusions, she saw things as they are, and had never at any period of her life possessed enthusiasms. Nor had she the least taste for hidden meanings and symbols. Maeterlinck, if she had heard of him, would have been dismissed by her with an easy smile. Anna's whitewash to her was whitewash—a disagreeable but economical wall-covering. She knew and approved of it as cheap; how

could she dream that it was also symbolic? She never dreamed at all, either sleeping or waking. If by some chance she had fallen into musings, she would have mused blood and iron, the superiority of the German nation, cookery in its three forms—*feine, bürgerliche*, and *Hausmannskost*, in all which forms she was pre-eminent in skill—she would have mused, that is, on facts, plain and undisputed. If she had had children she would have made an excellent mother; as it was she made excellent cakes—also a form of activity to be commended. She was a Dettingen before her marriage, and the Dettingens are one of the oldest Prussian families, and have produced more first-rate soldiers and statesmen and a larger number of mothers of great men than any other family in that part. The Penheims and Dettingens had intermarried continually, and it was to his mother's Dettingen blood that the first Fürst Penheim owed the energy that procured him his elevation. Princess Ludwig was a good example of the best type of female Dettingen. Like many other illiterates, she prided herself particularly on her sturdy commonsense. Regarding this quality, which she possessed, as more precious than others which she did not possess, she was not likely to sympathise much either with Anna's plan for making people happy, or with those who were willing to be made

happy in such a way. A sensible woman, she thought, will always find work, and need not look far for a home. She herself had been handicapped in the search by her unfortunate title, yet with patience even she had found a haven. Only the lazy and lackadaisical—the morally worthless, that is—would, she was convinced, accept such an offer as Anna's. It was not, however, her business. Her business was to look after Anna's house; and she did it with a zeal and thoroughness that struck terror into the hearts of the maidservants. Trudi's fitful energy was nothing to it. Trudi had introduced workmen and chaos; the princess, with a rapidity and skill little short of amazing to anyone unacquainted with the capabilities of the well-trained German *Hausfrau*, cleared out the workmen, and reduced the chaos to order. Within three weeks the house was ready, and Anna, palpitating, saw the moment approaching when the first batch of unhappy ones might be received.

Manske's time was entirely taken up writing letters of inquiry concerning the applicants, and it was surprising in what huge batches they had to be weeded out. Of fifty applications received in one day, three or four, after due inquiry, would alone remain for further consideration; and of these three or four, after yet closer inquiry, sometimes not one would be left.

At first Anna asked the princess's advice as well as Manske's, and it was when she was present at the consultations that the heap into which the letters of the unworthy were gathered was biggest. All those ladies belonging to the *bürgerliche* or middle classes were in her eyes wholly unworthy. If Anna had proposed to take washerwomen into her home, and required the princess's help in brightening their lives, it would have been given in the full measure, pressed down and running over, that befits a Christian gentlewoman; but for the *Bürgerlichen*, those belonging to the class more immediately below her own, the princess's feeling was only Christian so long as they kept a great way off. There was so much good sense in the objections she made that Anna, who did her best to keep an open mind and listen attentively to advice, was forced to agree with her, and added letters to the ever-increasing heap of the rejected which she might otherwise have reserved for riper consideration. After two or three days, however, it became clear to her that if she continued to consult the princess, no one would be accepted at all, for Manske's respect for that lady was so profound that he was invariably of her opinion. She did not, therefore, invite her again to assist at the interviews. Still, all she had said, and the knowledge that she must know her own countrywomen fairly

thoroughly, made Anna prudent; and so it came about that the first arrivals were to be only three in number, chosen without reference to the princess, and one of them was *bürgerlich*.

"We can meanwhile proceed with our inquiries about the remaining nine," said Manske, "and the gracious Miss will be always gaining experience."

She trod on air during the days preceding the arrival of the chosen. To say that she was blissful would be but an inadequate description of her state of mind. The weather was beautiful, and it increased her happiness tenfold to know that their new life was to begin in sunshine. She had never a doubt as to their delight in the sun-chequered forest, in the freshness of the glittering sea, in the peacefulness of the quiet country life, so quiet that the week seemed to be all Sundays. Were not these things sufficient for herself? Did she ever tire of those long pine vistas, with the narrow strip of clearest blue between the gently waving tree-tops? The dreamy murmur of the forest gave her an exquisite pleasure. To see the bloom on the pink and grey trunks of the pines, and the sun on the moss and lichen beneath, was so deep a satisfaction to her soul that the thought that others who had been knocked about by life would not feel it too, would not enter with profoundest thankfulness into this other world of

peace, never struck her at all. When these poor tired women, freed at last from every care and every anxiety, had refreshed themselves with the music and fragrance of the forest, there was the garden across the road to enjoy, with the marsh already strewn with kingcups on the other side of the hedge already turning green; and the sea with the fishing-smacks passing up and down, and the silver gleam of gulls' wings circling round the orange sails, and eagles floating high up aloft, specks in the infinite blue; and then there were drives along the coast towards the north, where the wholesome wind blew fresher than in the woods; and quiet evenings in the roomy house, where all that was asked of them was that they should be happy.

"It's a lovely plan, isn't it, Letty?" she said joyously, the evening before they were to arrive, as she stood with her arm round Letty's shoulder at the bottom of the garden, where they had both been watching the sails of the fishing-smacks during those short sunset moments when they looked like the bright wings of spirits moving over the face of the placid waters.

"I should rather think it was," replied Letty, who was profoundly interested.

They got up at sunrise the next morning, and went out into the forest in search of hepaticas and



windflowers with which to decorate the three bedrooms. These bedrooms were the largest and pleasantest in the house. Anna had given up her own because she thought the windows particularly pleasing, and had gone into a little one in the fervour of her desire to lavish all that was best on her new friends. The rooms were furnished with special care, an immense amount of thought having been bestowed on the colour of the curtains, the pattern of the porcelain, and the books filling the shelves above each writing-table. The colours and patterns were the nearest approach Berlin could produce to Anna's own favourite colours and patterns. She wasted half her time, when the rooms were ready, sitting in them and picturing what her own delight would have been if she, like the poor ladies for whom they were intended, had come straight out of a cold, unkind world into such pretty havens.

The choice of books had been a great difficulty, and there had been much correspondence on the subject with Berlin before a selection had been made. Books there must be, for no room, she thought, was habitable without them; and she had tried to imagine what manner of literature would most appeal to her unhappy ones. It was to be presumed that their ages were such as to exclude frivolity; therefore she bought very few novels. She thought Dickens translated into German would be a

safe choice; also Schlegel's Shakespeare for loftier moments. The German classics were represented by Goethe in one room, Schiller in another, and Heine in the third. In each room also there was a German-English dictionary, for the facilitation of intercourse. Finally, she asked the princess to recommend something they would be sure to like, and she recommended cookery-books.

"But they are not going to cook," said Anna, surprised.

"*Es ist egal*—it is always interesting to read good recipes. No other reading affords me the same pleasure."

"But only when you want something new cooked."

"No, no, at all times," insisted the princess.

Anna could not quite believe that such a taste was general; but in case one of the three should share it, she put a cookery-book in one bookcase. In the other two severally to balance it, she slipped at the last moment a volume of Maeterlinck, to which at that period she was greatly attached; and Matthew Arnold's poems, to which also at that period she was greatly attached.

The princess went about with pursed lips while these preparations were in progress; and when, at sunrise on the last morning, she was awakened by

stealthy footsteps and smothered laughter on the landing outside her room, and, opening her door an inch and peering out as in duty bound in case the sounds be emanating from some unaccountably mirthful maidservant, she saw Anna and Letty creeping downstairs with their hats on and baskets in their hands, she guessed what they were going to do, and got back into bed with lips more pursed than ever. Did she not know who had been chosen, and that one of the three was a *Bürgerliche*?

About eight o'clock, when the two girls were coming out of the forest with their baskets full and their faces happy, Axel Lohm was riding thoughtfully past, having just settled an unpleasant business at Kleinwalde. Dellwig had sent him an urgent message in the small hours; there had been a brawl among the labourers about a woman, and a man had been stabbed. Axel had ordered the aggressor to be locked up in the little room that served as a temporary prison till he could be handed over to the Stralsund authorities. His wife, a girl of twenty, was ill, and she and her three small children depended entirely on the man's earnings. The victim appeared to be dying, and the man would certainly be punished. What, then, thought Axel, was to become of the wife and the children? Frau Dellwig had told him that she sent soup every day at dinner-time, but soup once a day would neither comfort them nor

make them fat. Besides, he had a notion that the soup of Frau Dellwig's charity was very thin. He was riding dejectedly enough down the road on his way home, looking straight before him, his mouth a mere grim line, thinking how grievous it was that the consequences of sin should fall with their most terrific weight nearly always on the innocent, on the helpless womenfolk, and the weak little children, when Anna and Letty appeared, talking and laughing, on the edge of the forest.

Letty, we know, had not been kindly treated by nature, but even she was a pleasing object in her harmless morning cheerfulness after the faces he had just seen; and Anna's beauty, made radiant by happiness and contentment, startled him. He had a momentary twinge, gone almost before he had realised it, a sudden clear conception of his great loneliness. The satisfaction he strove to extract from improving his estate for the benefit of his brother Gustav appeared to him at that moment to bear a singular resemblance, in its thinness, to Frau Dellwig's charitable soup. He got off his horse to speak to her, and rested his eyes, tired by looking at the hideous passions on the brawler's face, on hers. "To-day is the important day, is it not?" he asked, glancing from her flower-like face to the flowers.

"The first three come this afternoon."

"So Manske told me. You are very happy, I can see," he said, smiling.

"I never was so happy before."

"Your uncle was a wise man. He told me he was going to leave you Kleinwalde because he felt sure you would be happy leading the simple life here."

"Did he talk about me to you?"

"After his last visit to England he talked about you all the time."

"Oh?" said Anna, looking at him thoughtfully. Uncle Joachim, she remembered perfectly, had urged two things—the leading of the better life, and the marrying of a good German gentleman. A faint flush came into her face and faded again. She had suddenly become aware that Axel was the good German gentleman he had meant. Well, the wisest uncle was subject to errors of judgment.

"I trust those women will not worry you too much," he said, thinking how immense would be the pity if those happy eyes ever lost their joyousness.

"Worry me? Poor things, they won't have any energy of any sort left after all they have gone through. I never read such pitiful letters."

"Well, I don't know," said Axel, doubtfully. "Manske says one of them is a Treumann. It is a

family distinguished by its size and its disagreeableness."

"Oh, but she only married a Treumann, and isn't one herself."

"But a woman generally adopts the peculiarities of the family she marries into, especially if they are unpleasant."

"But she has been a widow for years. And is so poor. And is so crushed."

"I never yet heard of a permanently crushed Treumann," said Axel, shaking his head.

"You are trying to make me uneasy," said Anna, a slight touch of impatience in her voice. She was singularly sensitive about her chosen ones; sensitive in the way mothers are about a child that is deformed.

"No, no," he said quickly, "I only wish to warn you. You may be disappointed—it is just possible." He could not bear to think of her as disappointed.

"Pray, do you know anything against the other two?" she asked with some defiance. "One of them is a Baroness Elmreich, and the other is a Fräulein Kuhräuber."

Axel looked amused. "I never heard of Fräulein Kuhräuber," he said. "What does Princess Ludwig say to her coming?"

"Nothing at all. What should she say?"

It was Fräulein Kuhräuber's coming that had more particularly occasioned the pursing of the princess's lips.

"I know some Elmreichs," said Axel. "A few of them are respectable; but one branch at least of the family is completely demoralised. A Baron Elmreich shot himself last year because he had been caught cheating at cards. And one of his sisters—oh, well, some of them are harmless, I believe."

"Thank-you."

"You are angry with me?"

"Very."

"And why?"

"You want to prejudice me against these poor things. They can't help what distant relations do. They will get away from them in my house, at least, and have peace."

"Miss Letty, is your aunt often—what is the word—so fractious?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Letty, who found it dull waiting in silence while other people talked. "It's breakfast-time, you know, and people can't stand much just about then."

"Oh, youthful philosopher!" exclaimed Axel. "So young, and of the female sex, and yet to have pierced to the very root of human weakness!"

"Stuff," said Letty, offended.

"What, are you going to be angry too? Then let me get on my horse and go."

"It's the best thing you can do," said Letty, always frank, but doubly so when she was hungry.

"Shall you come and see us soon?" Anna asked, gathering up her skirts in her one free hand preparatory to crossing the muddy road.

"But you are angry with me."

She looked up and laughed. "Not now," she said; "I've finished. Do you think I'm going to be angry long this pleasant April morning?"

"I smell the coffee," observed Letty, sniffing.

"Then I will come to-morrow if I may," said Axel, "and make the acquaintance of Frau von Treumann and Baroness Elmreich."

"And Fräulein Kuhräuber," said Anna, with emphasis. She thought she saw the same tendency in him that was so manifest in the princess—a tendency to ignore the very existence of anyone called Kuhräuber.

"And Fräulein Kuhräuber," repeated Axel gravely.

"They've burnt the toast again," said Letty; "I can hear them scraping off the black."

"I wish you good luck, then," said Axel, taking off his hat; "with all my heart I wish you good luck, and that these ladies may very soon be as happy as you are yourself."

"That's nice," said Anna, approvingly; "so much, much nicer than the other things you have been saying." And she nodded to him, all smiles, as she crossed over to the house and he rode away.

CHAPTER XIV.

LONG before the carriage bringing the three chosen ones from the station could possibly arrive, Anna and Letty began to wait in the hall, standing at the windows, going out onto the steps, looking into the different rooms every few minutes to make sure that everything was ready. The bedrooms were full of the hepaticas of the morning; the coffee had been set out with infinite care and an eye to effect by Anna herself on a little table in the drawing-room by the open window, through which the mild April air came in and gently fanned the curtains to and fro; and the princess had baked her best cakes for the occasion, inwardly deploring, as she did so, that such cakes should be offered to such people. When she had seen that all was as it should be, she withdrew into her own room, where she remained darning sheets, for she had asked Anna to excuse her from being present at the arrival. "It is better that you should make their acquaintance by yourself,"

she said. "The presence of too many strangers at first might disconcert them under the circumstances."

Miss Leech profited by this remark, made in her hearing, and did not appear either; so that when the carriage drove in at the gate only Anna and Letty were standing at the door in the sunshine.

Anna's heart bumped so as the three slowly disentangled themselves and got out, that she could hardly speak. Her face flushed and grew pale by turns, and her eyes were shining with something suspiciously like tears. What she wanted to do was to put her arms right round the three poor ladies, and kiss them, and comfort them, and make up for all their griefs. What she did was to put out a very cold, shaking hand, and say in a voice that trembled, "*Guten Tag.*"

"*Guten Tag.*" said the first lady to descend; evidently, from her mourning, the widowed Frau von Treumann.

Anna took her extended hand in both hers, and clasping it tight looked at its owner with all her heart in her eyes. "*Es freut mich so—es freut mich so,*" she murmured incoherently.

"*Ach—you are Miss Estcourt?*" asked the lady in German.

"Yes, yes," said Anna, still clinging to her hand, "and so happy, so very happy to see you."

Frau von Treumann hereupon made some remarks which Anna supposed were of a grateful nature, but she spoke so rapidly and in such subdued tones, glancing round uneasily as she did so at the coachman and at the others, and Anna herself was so much agitated, that what she said was quite incomprehensible. Again Anna longed to throw her arms round the poor woman's neck, and interrupt her with kisses, and tell her that gratitude was not required of her, but only that she should be happy; but she felt that if she did so she would begin to cry, and tears were surely out of place on such a joyful occasion, especially as nobody else looked in the least like crying.

"You are Frau von Treumann, I know," she said, holding her hand, and turning to the next one and beaming on her, "and this is Baroness Elmreich?"

"No, no," said the third lady quickly, "*I* am Baroness Elmreich."

Fräulein Kuhräuber, an ample person, whose body, swathed in travelling-cloaks, had blotted out the other little woman, looked frightened and apologetic, and made deep curtsies.

Anna shook their hands one after the other with all the warmth that was glowing in her heart. Her defective German forsook her almost completely. She did nothing but repeat disconnected ejaculations,

“*so reizend—so glücklich—so erfreut——*” and fill in the gaps with happy, quivering smiles at each in turn, and timid little pats on any hand within her reach.

Letty meanwhile stood in the shadow of the doorway wishing that she were young enough to suck her thumb. It kept on going up to her mouth of its own accord, and she kept on pulling it down again. This was one of the occasions, she felt, when the sucking of thumbs is a relief and a blessing. It gives one's superfluous hands occupation, and one-self a countenance. She shifted from one foot to the other uneasily, and held on tight to the rebellious thumb, for the tall lady who had got out first was fixing her with a stare that chilled her blood. The tall lady, who was very tall and thin, and had round, unblinking, dark eyes set close together like an owl's, and strongly marked black eyebrows, said nothing, but examined her slowly from the tip of the bow of ribbon trembling on her head to the buckles of the shoes creaking on her feet. Ought she to offer to shake hands with her, or ought she to wait to be shaken hands with, Letty asked herself distractedly. Anyhow it was rather rude to stare like that. She had always been taught that it was rude to stare like that.

Anna had forgotten all about her, and only remembered her when they were in the drawing-

room and she had begun to pour out the coffee. "Oh, Letty, where are you? This is my niece," she said; and Letty was at last shaken hands with.

"Ah—she keeps you company," said the baroness. "You found it lonely here, naturally."

"Oh no, I am never lonely," said Anna cheerfully, filling the cups and giving them to Letty to carry round.

"How pleasant the air is to-day," observed Frau von Treumann, edging her chair away from the window. "Damp, but pleasant. You like fresh air, I see."

"Oh, I love it," said Anna; "and it is so beautiful here—so pure, and full of the sea."

"You are not afraid of catching cold, sitting so near an open window?"

"Oh, is it too much for you? Letty, shut the window. It is getting chilly. The days are so fine that one forgets it is only April."

Anna talked German and poured out the coffee with a nervous haste unusual to her. The three women sitting round the little table staring at her made her feel terribly nervous. She was happy beyond words to have got them safely under her own roof at last, but she was nervous. She was determined that there should be no barriers of conventionality from the first between themselves and

her; not a minute more of their lives was to be wasted; this was their home, and she was all ready to love them; she had made up her mind that however shy she felt she was going to behave as though they were her dear friends—which indeed, she assured herself, was exactly what they were. Therefore she struggled bravely against her nervousness, addressing them collectively and singly, saying whatever came first into her head in her anxiety to say something, smiling at them, pressing the princess's cakes on them, hardly letting them drink their coffee before she wanted to give them more. But it was no good; she was and remained nervous, and her hand shook so when she lifted it that she was ashamed.

Fräulein Kuhräuber was the one who stared least. If she caught Anna's eye her own drooped, whereas the eyes of the other two never wavered. She sat on the edge of her chair in a way made familiar to Anna by intercourse with Frau Manske, and whatever anybody said she nodded her head and murmured "*Ja eben.*" She was obviously ill at ease, and dropped the sugar-tongs when she was offered sugar with a loud clatter onto the varnished floor, nearly sweeping the cups off the table in her effort to pick them up again.

"Oh, do not mind," said Anna, "Letty will pick

them up. They are stupid things—much too big for the sugar-basin.”

“*Ja eben,*” said Fräulein Kuhräuber, sitting up and looking perturbed. The other two removed their eyes from Anna’s face for a moment to stare at the Fräulein. The baroness, a small, fair person with hair arranged in those little flat curls called kiss-me-quicks on each cheek, and wide-open, pale-blue eyes, and a little mouth with no lips, or lips so thin that they were hardly visible, sat very still and straight, and had a way of moving her eyes round from one face to the other without at the same time moving her head. She was unmarried, and was probably about thirty-five, Anna thought, but she had always evaded questions in the correspondence about her age. Fräulein Kuhräuber was also thirty-five, and as large and blooming as the baroness was small and pale. Frau von Treumann was over fifty, and had had more sorrows, judging from her letters, than the other two. She sat nearest Anna, who every now and then laid her hand gently on hers and let it rest there a moment, in her determination to thaw all frost from the very beginning. “Oh, I quite forgot,” she said cheerfully—the amount of cheerfulness she put into her voice made her laugh at herself—“I quite forgot to introduce you to each other.”

“We did it at the station,” said Frau von Treu-

mann, "when we found ourselves all entering your carriage."

"The Elmreichs are connected with the Treumanns," observed the baroness.

"We are such a large family," said Frau von Treumann quickly, "that we are connected with nearly everybody."

The tone was cold, and there was a silence. Neither of them, apparently, was connected with Fräulein Kuhräuber, who buried her face in her cup in which the tea-spoon remained while she drank, and heartily longed for connections.

But she had none. She was absolutely without relations except deceased ones. She had been an orphan since she was two, cared for by her one aunt till she was ten. The aunt died, and she found a refuge in an orphanage till she was sixteen, when she was told that she must earn her bread. She was a lazy girl even in those days, who liked eating her bread better than earning it. No more, however, being forthcoming in the orphanage, she went into a pastor's family as *Stütze der Hausfrau*. These *Stütze*, or supports, are common in middle-class German families, where they support the mistress of the house in all her manifold duties, cooking, baking, mending, ironing, teaching or amusing the children—being in short a comfort and blessing to harassed mothers. But Fräulein Kuhräuber had no talent whatever for

comforting mothers, and she was quickly requested to leave the busy and populous parsonage; whereupon she entered upon the series of driftings lasting twenty years, which landed her, by a wonderful stroke of fortune, in Anna's arms.

When she saw the advertisement, her future was looking very black. She was, as usual, under notice to quit, and had no other place in view, and had saved nothing. It is true the advertisement only offered a home to women of good family; but she got over that difficulty by reflecting that her family was all in heaven, and that there could be no relations more respectable than angels. She wrote therefore in glowing terms of the paternal Kuhräuber, "*gegenwärtig mit Gott*," as she put it, expatiating on his intellect and gifts (he was a man of letters, she said), while he yet dwelt upon earth. Manske, with all his inquiries, could find out nothing about her except that she was, as she said, an orphan, poor, friendless, and struggling; and Anna, just then impatient of the objections the princess made to every applicant, quickly decided to accept this one, against whom not a word had been said. So Fräulein Kuhräuber, who had spent her life in shirking work, who was quite thriftless and improvident, who had never felt particularly unhappy, and whose father had been a postman, found herself being welcomed to Anna's home with an enthusiasm that astonished

her, being smiled upon and patted, having beautiful things said to her—things the very opposite to those to which she had been used, things to the effect that she was now to rest herself for ever, and to be sure and not do anything except just that which made her happiest.

It was very wonderful. It seemed much, much too good to be true. And the delight that filled her as she sat eating excellent cakes, and the discomfort she endured because of the stares of the other two women, and the consciousness that she had never learned how to behave in the society of persons with *von* before their names, produced such mingled feelings of ecstasy and fright in her bosom that it was quite natural she should drop the sugar-tongs, and upset the cream-jug, and choke over her coffee—all of which things she did, to Anna's distress, who suffered with her in her agitation, while the eyes of the other two watched each successive catastrophe with profoundest attention.

It was an uncomfortable half hour. "I am shy, and they are shy," Anna said to herself, apologising as it were for the undoubted flatness that prevailed. How could it be otherwise, she thought? Did she expect them to gush? Heaven forbid. Yet it was an important crisis in their lives, this passing for ever from neglect and loneliness to love, and she wondered vaguely that the obviously paramount feel-

ing should be interest in the awkwardness of Fräulein Kuhräuber.

Her German faltered, and threatened to give out entirely. The inevitable pause came, and they could hear the sparrows quarrelling in the golden garden, and the creaking of a distant pump.

"How still it is," observed the baroness with a slight shiver.

"You have no farmyard near the house to make it more cheerful," said Frau von Treumann. "My father's house had the garden at the back, and the farmyard in the front, and one did not feel so cut off from everything. There was always something going on in the yard—always life and noises."

"Really?" said Anna; and again the pump and the sparrows became audible.

"The stillness is truly remarkable," observed the baroness again.

"*Ja eben,*" said Fräulein Kuhräuber.

"But it is beautiful, isn't it," said Anna, gazing out at the light on the water. "It is so restful, so soothing. Look what a lovely sunset there must be this evening. We can't see it from this side of the house, but look at the colour of the grass and the water."

"*Ach*—you are a friend of nature," said Frau von Treumann, turning her head for a brief moment towards the window, and then examining Anna's

face. "I am also. There is nothing I like more than nature. Do you paint?"

"I wish I could."

"Ah, then you sing—or play?"

"I can do neither."

"So? But what have you here, then, in the way of distractions, of pastimes?"

"I don't think I have any," said Anna, smiling. "I have been very busy till now making things ready for you, and after this I shall just enjoy being alive."

Frau von Treumann looked puzzled for a moment. Then she said "*Ach so.*"

There was another silence.

"Have some more coffee," said Anna, laying hold of the pot persuasively. She was feeling foolish, and had blushed stupidly after that *Ach so*.

"No, no," said Frau von Treumann, putting up a protesting hand, "you are very kind. Two cups are a limit beyond which voracity itself could not go. What do you say? You have had three? Oh, well, you are young, and young people can play tricks with their digestions with less danger than old ones."

At this speech Fräulein Kuhräuber's four cups became plainly written on her guilty face. The thought that she had been voracious at the very first meal was appalling to her. She hastily pushed

away her half-empty cup—too hastily, for it upset, and in her effort to save it it fell onto the floor and was broken. "*Ach, Herr je!*" she cried in her distress.

The other two looked at each other; the expression is an unusual one on the lips of gentlewomen.

"Oh, it does not matter—really it does not," Anna hastened to assure her. "Don't pick it up—Letty will. The table is too small really. There is no room on it for anything."

"*Ja eben,*" said Fräulein Kuhräuber, greatly discomfited.

"You would like to go upstairs, I am sure," said Anna hurriedly, turning to the others. "You must be very tired," she added, looking at Frau von Treumann.

"I am," replied that lady, closing her eyes for a moment with a little smile expressive of patient endurance.

"Then we will go up. Come," she said, holding out her hand to Fräulein Kuhräuber. "No, no—let Letty pick up the pieces——" for the Fräulein, in her anxiety to repair the disaster, was about to sweep the remaining cups off the table with the sleeve of her cloak.

Anna drew her hand through her arm, and gave it a furtive and encouraging stroke. "I will go first

and show you the way," she said over her shoulder to the others.

And so it came about that Frau von Treumann and Baroness Elmreich actually found themselves going through doors and upstairs behind a person called Kuhräuber. They exchanged glances again. Whatever might be their private objections to each other, they had one point already on which they agreed, for with equal heartiness they both disapproved of Fräulein Kuhräuber.

CHAPTER XV.

As soon as Baroness Elmreich found herself alone in her bedroom, she proceeded to examine its contents with minute care. Supper, she had been told, was not till eight o'clock, and she had not much to unpack; so laying aside her hat and cloak, and glancing at the reflection of her little curls in the glass to see whether they were as they should be, she began her inspection of each separate article in her room, taking each one up and scrutinising it, holding the jars of hepaticas high above her head in order to see whether the price was marked underneath, untidying the bed to feel the quality of the sheets, poking the mattress to discover the nature of the stuffing, and investigating with special attention the embroidery on the pillow-cases. But everything was as dainty and as perfect as enthusiasm could make it. Nowhere, with her best endeavours, could she discover the signs she was looking for of cheapness and shabbiness in less noticeable things that would have helped her to understand her hostess.



"This embroidery has cost at least two marks the meter," she said to herself, fingering it. "She must roll in money. And the wall-paper—how unpractical! It is so light that every mark will be seen. The flies alone will ruin it in a month."

She shrugged her shoulders, and smiled; strange to say, the thought of Anna's paper being spoiled pleased her.

Never had she been in a room the least like this one. If whitewash prevailed downstairs, and in Anna's special haunts, it had not been permitted to invade the bedrooms of the Chosen. Anna's reflections had led her to the conclusion that the lives of these ladies had till then probably been spent in bare places, and that they would accordingly feel as much pleasure in the contemplation of carpets, papered walls, and stuffed chairs, as she herself did in the severity of her whitewashed rooms after the lavishly upholstered years of her youth. But the daintiness and luxury only filled the baroness with doubts. She stood in the middle of it looking round her when she had finished her tour of inspection and had made guesses at the price of everything, and asked herself who this Miss Estcourt could be. Anna would have been considerably disappointed, and perhaps even moved to tears, if she had known that the room she thought so pretty struck the baroness, whose taste in furniture had not advanced beyond

an appreciation for the dark and heavy hangings and walnut-wood tables of her more prosperous years, merely as odd. Odd, and very expensive. Where did the money come from for this reckless furnishing with stuffs and colours that were bound to show each stain? Her eye wandered along the shelves above the writing-table—hers was the Heine and Maeterlinck room—and she wondered what all the books were there for. She did not touch them as she had touched everything else, for except an occasional novel, and, more regularly, a journal beloved of German woman called the *Gartenlaube*, she never read.

On the writing-table lay a blotter, a pretty, embroidered thing that said as plainly as blotter could say that it had been chosen with immense care; and opening it she found note-paper and envelopes stamped with the Kleinwalde address and her own monogram. This was Anna's little special gift, a childish addition, the making of which had given her an absurd amount of pleasure. The happy idea, as she called it, had come to her one night when she lay awake thinking about her new friends and going through the familiar process of discovering their tastes by imagining herself in their place. "*Sonderbar*," was the baroness's comment; and she decided that the best thing she could do would be to ring the bell and endeavour to obtain private information

about Miss Estcourt by means of a prolonged cross-examination of the housemaid.

She rang it, and then sat very straight and still on the sofa with her hands folded in her lap, and waited. Her soul was full of doubts. Who was this Miss, and where were the proofs that she was, as she had pretended, of good birth? That she was not so very pious was evident; for if she had been, some remark of a religious nature would inevitably have been forthcoming when she first welcomed them to her house. No such word, not the least approach to any such word, had been audible. There had not even been an allusion, a sigh, or an upward glance. Yet the pastor who had opened the correspondence had filled many pages with expatiations on her zeal after righteousness. And then she was so young. The baroness had expected to see an elderly person, or at least a person of the age of everybody else, which was her own age; but this was a mere girl, and a girl, too, who, from the way she dressed, clearly thought herself pretty. Surely it was strange that so young a woman should be living here quite unattached, quite independent apparently of all control, with a great deal of money at her disposal, and only one little girl to give her a countenance? Suppose she were not a proper person at all, suppose she were an outcast from society, a being on whom her own country-people turned their backs?

This desire to share her fortune with respectable ladies could only be explained in two ways: either she had been moved thereto by an enthusiastic piety of which not a trace had as yet appeared, or she was an improper person anxious to rebuild her reputation with the aid and countenance of the ladies of good family she had entrapped into her house.

The baroness stiffened as she sat. It was her brother who had cheated at cards and shot himself, and it was her sister of whom Axel Lohm had heard strange tales; and few people are more savagely proper than the still respectable relations of the demoralised. "The service in this house is very bad," she said aloud and irascibly, getting up to ring again. "No doubt she has trouble with her servants."

But there was a knock at the door while her hand was on the bell, and on her calling "Come in," instead of the servant her hostess appeared, dressed to the baroness's eye in a truly amazing and reprehensible fashion, and looking as cheerful as an innocent infant for whom no such thing as evil-doing exists. Also she seemed quite unconscious of her clothes and bare neck, nor did she offer to explain why she was arrayed as though she were going to a ball; and she stood a moment in the doorway trying to say something in German and pretending to laugh at her own ineffectual efforts, but

really laughing, the baroness felt sure, in order to show that she had dimples; which were not, after all, very wonderful things to have—before she had grown so thin she almost had one herself.

"May I come in?" said Anna at last, giving up the other and more complicated speech.

"*Bitte*," said the baroness, with the smile the French call *pince*.

"Has no one been to unpack your things?"

"I rang."

"And no one came? Oh, I shall scold Marie. It is the only thing I can do well in German. Can you speak English?"

"No."

"Nor understand it?"

"No."

"French?"

"No."

"Oh, well, you must be patient then with my bad German. When I am alone with anyone it goes better, but if there are many people listening I am nervous and can hardly speak at all. How glad I am that you are here!"

Anna's shyness, now that she was by herself with one of her forlorn ones, had vanished, and she prattled happily for some time, putting as many mistakes into her sentences as they would hold, before she became aware that the baroness's replies

were monosyllabic, and that she was examining her from head to foot with so much attention that there was obviously none left over for the appreciation of her remarks.

This made her feel shy again. Clothes to her were such secondary considerations, things of so little importance. Susie had provided them, and she had put them on, and there it had ended; and when she found that it was her dress and not herself that was interesting the baroness, she longed to have the courage to say, "Don't waste time over it now—I'll send it to your room to-night, if you like, and you can look at it comfortably—only don't waste time now. I want to talk to you, to *you* who have suffered so much; I want to make friends with you quickly, to make you begin to be happy quickly: so don't let us waste the precious time thinking of clothes." But she had neither sufficient courage nor sufficient German.

She put out her hand rather timidly, and making an effort to bring her companion's thoughts back to the things that mattered, said, "I hope you will like living with me. I hope we shall be very happy together. I can't tell you how happy it makes me to think that you are safely here, and that you are going to stay with me always."

The baroness's hands were clasped in front of her, and they did not unclasp to meet Anna's; but

at this speech she left off eyeing the dress, and began to ask questions. "You are very lonely, I can see," she said with another of the pinched smiles. "Have you then no relations? No one of your own family who will live with you? Will not your *Frau Mama* come to Germany?"

"My mother is dead."

"*Ach*—mine also. And the *Herr Papa*?"

"He is dead."

"*Ach*—mine also."

"I know, I know," said Anna, stroking the unresponsive hands—a trick of hers when she wanted to comfort that had often irritated Susie. "You told me how lonely you were in your letters. I lived with my brother and his wife till I came here. You have no brothers or sisters, I think you wrote."

"None," said the baroness with a rigid look.

"Well, I am going to be your sister, if you will let me."

"You are very good."

"Oh, I am not good, only so happy—I have everything in the world that I have ever wished to have, and now that you have come to share it all there is nothing more I can think of that I want."

"*Ach*," said the baroness. Then she added, "Have you no aunts, or cousins, who would come and stay with you?"

"Oh, heaps. But they are all well off and quite

pleased, and they wouldn't like staying here with me at all."

"They would not like staying with you? How strange."

"Very strange," laughed Anna. "You see they don't know how pleasant I can be in my own house."

"And your friends—they too will not come?"

"I don't know if they would or not. I didn't ask them."

"You have no one, no one at all, who would come and live with you so that you should not be so lonely?"

"But I am not lonely," said Anna, looking down at the little woman with a slightly amused expression, "and I don't in the least want to be lived with."

"Then why do you wish to fill your house with strangers?"

"Why?" repeated Anna, a puzzled look coming into her eyes. Had not the correspondence with the ultimately chosen been long? And were not all her reasons duly set forth therein? "Why, because I want you to have some of my nice things too."

"But not your own friends and relations?"

"They have everything they want."

There was a silence. Anna left off stroking the baroness's hands. She was thinking that this was a

queer little person—outside, that is. Inside, of course, she was very different, poor little lonely thing; but her outer crust seemed thick; and she wondered how long it would take her to get through it to the soul that she was sure was sweet and lovable. She was also unable to repress a conviction that most people would call these questions rude.

But this train of thought was not one to be encouraged. "I am keeping you here talking," she said, resuming her first cheerfulness, "and your things are not unpacked yet. I shall go and scold Marie for not coming when you rang, and I'll send her to you." And she went out quickly, vexed with herself for feeling chilled, and left the baroness more full of doubts than ever.

When she had rebuked Marie, who looked gloomy, she tapped at Frau von Treumann's door. No one answered. She knocked again. No one answered. Then she opened the door softly and looked in.

These were precious moments, she felt, these first moments of being alone with each of her new friends, precious opportunities for breaking ice. It is true she had not been able to break much of the ice encasing the baroness, but she was determined not to be cast down by any of the little difficulties she was sure to encounter at first, and she looked into Frau von Treumann's room with fresh hope in her heart.

What, then, was her dismay to find that lady walking up and down with the long strides of extreme excitement, her face bathed in tears.

"Oh—what's the matter?" gasped Anna, shutting the door quickly and hurrying in.

Frau von Treumann had not heard the gentle taps, and when she saw her, started, and tried to hide her face in her handkerchief.

"Tell me what is the matter," begged Anna, her voice full of tenderness.

"*Nichts, Nichts,*" was the hasty reply. "I did not hear you knock——"

"Tell me what is the matter," begged Anna again, fairly putting her arms round the poor lady. "Our letters have said so much already—surely there is nothing you cannot tell me now? And if I can help you——"

Frau von Treumann freed herself by a hasty movement, and began to walk up and down again. "No, no, you can do nothing—you can do nothing," she said, and wept as she walked.

Anna watched her in consternation.

"See to what I have come—see to what I have come!" said the agitated lady under her breath but with passionate intensity, as she passed and repassed her dismayed hostess; "oh, to have fallen so low! oh, to have fallen so low!"

"So low?" echoed Anna, greatly concerned.

"At my age—I, a Treumann—I, a *geborene* Gräfin Ilmas-Kedenstein—to live on charity—to be a member of a charitable institution!"

"Institution? Charity? Oh no, no!" cried Anna. "It is a home here, and there is no charity in it from the attic to the cellar." And she went towards her with outstretched hands.

"A home! Yes, that is it," cried Frau von Treumann, waving her back, "it is a home, a charitable home!"

"No, not a home like that—a real home, my home, your home—*ein Heim*," Anna protested; but vainly, because the German word *Heim* and the English word home have little meaning in common.

"*Ein Heim, ein Heim*," repeated Frau von Treumann with extraordinary bitterness, "*ein Frauenheim*—yes, that is what it is, and everybody knows it."

"Everybody knows it?"

"How could I think," she said, wringing her hands,—“how could I think when I decided to come here that the whole world was to be made acquainted with your plans? I thought they were to be kept private, that the world was to think we were your friends——”

"And so you are."

"—your guests——"

"Oh, more than guests—this is home."

"Home! Home! Always that word——" And she burst into a fresh torrent of tears.

Anna stood helpless. What she said appeared only to aggravate Frau von Treumann's sorrow and rage—for surely there was anger as well as sorrow? She was at a complete loss for the reason of this outburst. Had not every detail been discussed in the correspondence? Had not that correspondence been exhaustive even to boredom?

"You have told your servants——"

"My servants?"

"You have told them that we are objects of charity——"

"I——" began Anna, and then was silent.

"It is not true—I have come here from very different motives—but they think me an object of charity. I rang the bell—I cannot unstrap my trunks—I never have been expected to unstrap trunks." The sobs here interfered for a moment with further speech. "After a long while—your servant came—she was insolent—the trunks are there still unstrapped—you see them—she knows—everything."

"She shall go to-morrow."

"The others think the same thing."

"They shall go to-morrow—that is, have they been rude to you?"

"Not yet, but they will be."

"When they are, they shall go."

"I went into the corridor to seek other assistance, and I met—I met——"

"Who?"

"Oh, to have fallen so low!" cried Frau von Treumann, clasping her hands, and raising her streaming eyes to the ceiling.

"But who did you meet?"

"I met—I met the Penheim."

"The Penheim? Do you mean Princess Ludwig?"

"You never said she was here——"

"I did not know that it would interest you."

"—living on charity—she was always shameless—I was at school with her. Oh, I would not have come for any inducement if I had known she was here! She holds nothing sacred, she will boast of her own degradation, she will write to all her friends that I am here too—I told them I was coming only on a visit to you—they knew I knew your uncle—but the Penheim—the Penheim——" and Frau von Treumann threw herself into a chair and covered her face with her hands to shut out the horrid vision.

The corners of Anna's mouth began to take the upward direction that would end in a smile; and feeling how ill-placed such a contortion would be in the presence of this tumultuous grief, she brought them carefully back to a position of proper solemnity.

Besides, why should she smile? The poor lady was clearly desperately unhappy about something, though what it was Anna did not quite know. She had looked forward to this first evening with her new friends as to a thing apart, a thing beyond the ordinary experience of life, profound in its peace, perfect in its harmony, the first taste of rest after war, of port after stormy seas; and here was Frau von Treumann plunged in a very audible grief, and in the next room was the baroness, a disconcerting combination of inquisitiveness and ice, and farther down the passage was Fräulein Kuhräuber—in what state, Anna wondered, would she find Fräulein Kuhräuber? Anyhow she had little reason to smile. But the horror with which Princess Ludwig had been mentioned seemed droll beside her own knowledge of the sterling qualities of that excellent woman. She went over to the chair in which Frau von Treumann lay prostrate, and sat down beside her. She was glad that they had reached the stage of sitting down, for talking is difficult to a person who will not keep still.

“How sorry I am,” she said, in her pretty, hesitating German, “that you should have been made unhappy the very first evening. Marie is a little wretch. Don’t let her stupidity make you miserable. You shall not see her again, I promise you.” And she patted Frau von Treumann’s arm. “But about

Princess Ludwig, now," she went on cheerfully; "she has been here some weeks and you soon learn to know a person you are with every day, and really I have found her nothing but good and kind."

"*Ach*, she is shameless—she recoils before no degradation!" burst out Frau von Treumann, suddenly removing her hands from her face. "The trouble she has given her relations! She delights in dragging her name in the dirt. She has tried to get places in the most impossible families, and made no attempt to hide what she was doing. She has broken the old Fürst's heart. And she talks about it all, and has no shame, no decency——"

"But is it not admirable——" began Anna.

"She will gloat over me, and tell everyone that I am here in the same way as she is. If she is not ashamed for herself, do you think she will spare me?"

"But why should you think there is anything to be ashamed of in coming to live with me and be my dear friend?"

"No, there is nothing, so long as my motives in coming are known. But people talk so cruelly, and will distort the facts so gladly, and we have always held our heads so high. And now the Penheim!" She sobbed afresh.

"I shall ask the princess not to write to anyone about your being here."

"*Ach*, I know her—she will do it all the same."

"No, I don't think so. She does everything I ask. You see, she takes care of my house for me. She is not here in the same way that—that you and Baroness Elmreich are, and her interest is to stay here."

Frau von Treumann's bowed head went up with a jerk. "*Ach?* She has found a place at last? She is your paid companion? Your housekeeper?"

"Yes, and she is goodness itself, and I don't believe she would be unkind and make mischief for worlds."

"*Ach so!*" said Frau von Treumann, "*ach so-o-o-o!*"—a long drawn out *so* of complete comprehension. Her tears ceased as if by magic. She dried her eyes. Yes, of course the Penheim would hold her tongue if Miss Estcourt ordered her to do so. She had heard all about her efforts to find places, and she would probably be very careful not to lose this one. The poor Penheim. So she was actually working for wages. What a come-down for a Dettingen! And the Dettingens had always treated the Treumanns as though they belonged merely to the *kleine Adel*. Well, well, each one in turn. She was the dear friend, and the Penheim was the housekeeper. Well, well.

She sat up straight, smoothed her hair, and resumed her first manner of quiet dignity. "I am

sorry that you should have witnessed my agitation," she said, with a faint smile. "I am not easily betrayed into exhibitions of feeling, but there are limits to one's endurance, there are certain things the bravest cannot bear."

"Yes," said Anna.

"And for a Treumann, social disgrace, any action that in the least soils our honour and makes us unable to hold up our heads, is worse than death."

"But I don't see any disgrace."

"No, no, there is none so long as facts are not distorted. It is quite simple—you need friends, and I am willing to be your friend. That was how my son looked at it. He said '*Liebe Mama*, she evidently needs friends and sympathy—why should you hesitate to make yourself of use? You must regard it as a good work.' You would like my son; his brother officers adore him."

"Really?" said Anna.

"He is so sensible, so reasonable; he is beloved and respected by the whole regiment. I will show you his photograph—*ach*, the trunks are still unstrapped."

"I'll go and send someone—but not Marie," said Anna, getting up quickly. She had no desire to see the photograph, and the son's way of looking at things had considerably astonished her. "It must be nearly supper-time. Would you not rather lie

down and let me send you something here? Your head must ache after crying so much. You have baptised our new life with tears. I hope it is a good omen."

"Oh, I will come down. You will do as you promised, will you not, and forbid the Penheim to gossip?"

"I shall tell the princess your wishes."

"Or, if she must gossip, let her tell the truth at least. If my son had not pressed me to come here I really do not think——"

Anna went slowly and meditatively down the passage to Fräulein Kuhräuber's room. For a moment she thought of omitting this last visit altogether; she was afraid lest the *Fräulein* should be in some unlooked-for and perplexing condition of mind. Discouraged? Oh no; she was surely not discouraged already. How had the word come into her head? She quickened her steps. When she reached the door she remembered the cup and the sugar-tongs. Perhaps something in the bedroom was already broken, and the *Fräulein* would be disclosed sitting in the ruins in tears, for she was unexpectedly large, and the contents of her room were frail. But then woe of that sort was as easily assuaged as broken furniture was mended. It was the more complicated grief of Frau von Treumann that she felt unable to soothe. As to that, she pre-

ferred not to think about it at present, and barricaded her thoughts against its image with that consoling sentence *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*. It was a sentence she was fond of; but she had not expected that she would need its reassurance so soon.

She opened the door, and the puckers smoothed themselves out of her forehead at once, for here, at last, was peace. There had been no difficulties here with bells, and straps, and Marie. The trunks had been opened and unpacked without assistance; and when Anna came in the contents were all put away and Fräulein Kuhräuber, washed and combed and in her Sunday blouse, was sitting in an easy chair by the window absorbed in a book. Satisfaction was written broadly on her face; content was expressed by every lazy line of her attitude. When she saw Anna, she got up and made a curtsy and beamed. The beams were instantly reflected in Anna's face, and they beamed at each other.

"Well?" said Anna, who felt perfectly at her ease with this member of her trio, "Are you happy?"

Fräulein Kuhräuber blushed, and beamed more than ever. She was far less shy of Anna than she was of those two terrible *adelige Damen*, her travelling companions; but at no time had she had much conversation. Hers had been a ruminative existence,

for its uncertainty but rarely disturbed her. Had she not an excellent digestion, and a fixed belief that the righteous, of whom she was one, would never be forsaken? And are not these the primary conditions of happiness? Indeed, if everything else is wanting, these two ingredients by themselves are sufficient for the concoction of a very palatable life.

"You have found an interesting book already?" Anna asked, pleased that the literature chosen with such care should have met with instant appreciation. She took it up to see what it was, but put it down again hastily, for it was the cookery-book.

"I read much," observed Fräulein Kuhräuber.

"Yes?" said Anna, a flicker of hope reviving in her heart. Perhaps the cookery-book was an accident.

"I know by heart more than a hundred recipes for sweet dishes alone."

"Really?" said Anna, the flicker expiring.

"So you can have an idea of the number of books I have read."

"Here are a great many more for you to read."

"*Ach ja, ach ja,*" said Fräulein Kuhräuber, glancing doubtfully at the shelves; "but one must not waste too much time over it—there are other things in life. I read only useful books."

"Well, that is very praiseworthy," said Anna,

smiling. "If you like cookery-books I must get you some more."

"How good you are—how very, very good!" said the *Fräulein*, gazing at the charming figure before her with heartfelt admiration and gratitude. "This beautiful room—I cannot look at it enough. I cannot believe it is really for me—for me to sleep in and be in whenever I choose. What have I done to deserve all this?"

What had she done, indeed? She had not even been unhappy, although of course she had had every opportunity of being so, sent from place to place, from one indignant *Hausfrau* to another, ever since she left school. But Anna, persuaded that she had rescued her from depths of unspeakable despair, was overjoyed by this speech. "Don't talk about deserving," she said tenderly. "You have had such a life that if you were to be happy now without stopping once for the next fifty years it would only be just and right."

Fräulein Kuhräuber's approval of this sentiment was so entire that she seized Anna's hand and kissed it fervently. Anna laughed while this was going on, and her eyes grew brighter. She had not wanted gratitude, but now that it had come it was very encouraging after all, and very warming. She put one arm impulsively round the *Fräulein's* neck and kissed her; and this was practically the first kiss that

lady had ever received, for the perfunctory embraces of reluctantly dutiful aunts can hardly be called by that pretty name.

"Now," said Anna, with a happy laugh, "we are going to be friends for ever. Come, let us go down. That was the supper-bell."

And they went downstairs together, appearing in the doorway of the drawing-room arm in arm, as though they had loved each other for years.

"As though they were twins," muttered the baroness to Frau von Treumann, who shrugged one shoulder slightly by way of reply.

END OF VOL. I.

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